

No. 584

MARCH 7, 1908

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NICK CARTER

NEW
WEEKLY

A MILLION DOLLARS REWARD





NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 72-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1906, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.

No. 584.

NEW YORK, March 7, 1908.

Price Five Cents.

A Million Dollars Reward

OR.

Nick Carter's Process of Induction.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE THEFT OF THE "GODDESS' HEART."

Mrs. Herbert Payson was an enthusiast. She had a passion which amounted to a mania.

In the beginning, when she was quite a young girl, it was called a fad, but as she grew older it developed into a passion and thence to a mania. Her whole soul and being was given up to her passion for precious stones.

She worshiped them. They were her religion. We have all heard of Fire-worshippers, Devil-worshippers, and the like; Rena Payson was a Gem-worshiper.

Fortunately, her father had been many times a millionaire, and, therefore, she had been able to gratify her taste in the collection of precious stones after a manner that was almost unlimited. When he died, the bulk of his great fortune went to her, and again there was no stint put upon the gratification of her one great desire.

Later, she married Herbert Payson, who had inherited as many millions as she had, and there was literally nothing in the world that she could not buy, that she might not have bought, save perhaps here and there rare gems that were owned by people as rich as she was herself.

When she came upon an incident of this kind, where

it was impossible to purchase, the covetousness of her greed amounted to a frenzy, and the result of it all was that, rich as she was, she finally resorted to theft to satisfy her overpowering passion.

In the mansion where she lived with her husband and her two children, on upper Fifth Avenue—a mansion built under her own direct supervision—she had had constructed a secret room, a hidden chamber, where she kept her treasures, and to this room she was in the habit of retiring at least once during the twenty-four hours of each day, to indulge in her strange worship.

There she would remain for an hour or more in rapt contemplation of her jewels, her eyes glowing, her cheeks burning, her breath panting, her lips parted, her whole being enthralled in the gratification of her passionate desire.

Within the four walls of that room, twelve feet square, there were upward of three million dollars' worth of jewels; and they glowed and blazed with a thousand fires from the black velvet background with which the walls, the ceiling, and the floor were covered.

Even the table in the center of the room was of ebony, topped with black velvet plush. The huge ebony rocker was upholstered in black leather; the couch was the same and the pillow upon it was encased in black silk.

There was nothing there in that room that was not black, save the jewels themselves, and the electric lights which were there to lend their fires to the stones.

One of the strange things about the gem-worship indulged in by Rena Payson was the fact that she did it in secret; that she had always done it in secret. Even her husband had never guessed this peculiarity of his wife's until after she had stolen a considerable number of valuable jewels from other women, and the sagacity of Nick Carter had found her out.

She had managed to give her husband, as well as others, the impression that she cared very little for jewels, since she rarely wore her choicest ones which she was known to possess.

The fact was that she was jealous of them, just as an old man is sometimes jealous of his beautiful young wife. She could not bear the thought that others might feast their eyes upon her treasures, and so she hid them away in that secret room of hers, of whose existence her husband did not know; and if she were asked where such and such a jewel was, and why she did not wear it, she inevitably managed to create the impression that it was because she was too conscious of them all.

And then had come the unpleasant revelation brought about by the sagacity of Nick Carter.

There was an exclusive club which formed a part of New York society. It was known as the "Infallibles," and numbered fifty-two persons.

Among them things began to disappear mysteriously, and with never a trace of who had taken them until Nick Carter came upon the scene and discovered that Mrs. Payson was the guilty party.

Of course, all the stolen articles were returned to the owners, together with a confession from Rena Payson; a confession which was confined to those directly interested, so that the world never knew a thing about the matter.

And to do Rena justice, she was thoroughly penitent.

The thefts, with her, had been a mere gratification of her passion for possession.

She had done nothing with the jewels she stole, save to take them to her "gem-room" and add them to the decorations of the walls; and, compared to what she possessed besides, the thefts were as a penny would be to a hundred dollars.

And so the affair was hushed up.

Those who had had their jewels returned to them agreed to let the matter drop, for when all was said Rena was a favorite among them, and they regarded her acts much as they might have viewed a habit of drinking too much liquor—as an unfortunate weakness which should be condoned.

It was after that that Rena consented occasionally to take a few privileged persons to her gem-room. She permitted her husband to visit it once in a while. She

took Nick Carter there on one occasion, about a month after the exposé of her wrong-doing; she invited Adelina—Patsy's wife—to visit it once.

But that was all.

Otherwise the room was kept as sacredly closed as it had been before; but always there was an hour or two during each day when Rena was not to be found, and when her husband understood that she was in that hidden room, worshipping her gems.

In this manner almost a year passed after the confession of Rena Payson and the return of the stolen jewels, when the incident occurred that forms the basis, or a part of the basis, of this story.

All gem-lovers and precious-stone collectors throughout the world, all experts and dealers, knew about the great, heart-shaped ruby that belonged to the Raja Ghanmahr, of northern India. Indeed, its history has been generally known among such people for more than two hundred years, when it was exhibited for the first time.

It was said to have been in the family of the raja and to have belonged to his direct ancestors since time immemorial. He himself claimed that they had owned it more than a thousand years, and the legend was that it was given to his far-away ancestor by a special messenger from the celestial realms.

Gem-fanciers had traveled all the way to India to see the great ruby, known by an unpronounceable Indian name, which, being translated, meant "The Goddess' Heart." Sometimes they had been permitted to see it, sometimes not; but it was known to be the largest, the purest, and the most valuable ruby in the world.

Then, one day, like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, came the information, flashed out over all the civilized world, that "The Goddess' Heart" had been stolen.

It had disappeared mysteriously, but completely, from the strong room in the very center of the raja's palace that had been made expressly to hold it, and there had been left no sign or indication as to how the marauder had managed to penetrate to that sacred room, or how he had escaped from the palace and the country with the great heart-shaped ruby.

Bolts and bars had remained undisturbed. The great onyx box, lined with gold and satin and studded with diamonds, in which the ruby was kept, on a table in the middle of the room, was closed and locked as securely after the ruby was taken as it had been before.

The three separate keys which were required to unlock that box of onyx were still in the possession of the persons who never parted with them, the raja, the raja's first-born son, and the high priest of the palace and of the raja's suite.

To obtain access to the ruby, it was necessary that those three men should be present, each to make use of his key, the high priest first, the raja's son next, and the

old raja himself finally opening the box with his key and throwing back the lid.

Even the room in which the ruby was contained, in the very center of the great palace, was guarded in like manner, for again three keys were required.

One of these, the first one, was in the possession of the chief of the palace guard and was never allowed out of his control. The second key to the room was held by the raja's second son, who regarded it as a sacred trust, and the third was worn upon a golden chain that was forever kept fastened around the slender throat of the raja's beautiful daughter Deehra.

And yet, when, after conforming to all the requirements and regulations governing an exhibition of the ruby, a great magnate of New York, traveling in India, had been taken to see "The Goddess' Heart"—when the door of the sacred room was opened and the lid of the diamond-studded onyx box was thrown back, the heart-shaped bed of satin upon which the ruby had reposed for hundreds of years was vacant, empty. The blazing ruby was not there.

The great banker who was there to see it believed for a moment that he had been hoaxed; he thought so until he turned his eyes upon the old raja, who stood before him, and saw that the prince was trembling as if with a palsy, and that his eldest son and the high priest had fallen upon their knees in horror, that the second son had thrown himself flat upon his face, that Deehra, the daughter, stood as one transfixed with terror, and that the chief of the palace guard had fled from the room. Then he understood that it was no hoax that had been practised upon him, but that something worse than a tragedy had been enacted, and he was the unwitting witness of its consequences.

There were many silent moments in that sacred room before any one spoke at all; then the raja, who seemed to be the first to recover, slowly closed down the lid of the onyx box and turned his key. Then he motioned to his son and to the high priest to follow his example with their keys, and so the onyx box and the sacred room were both relocated, and the entire party filed back again to the raja's cabinet.

That same day the information that the ruby had been stolen was flashed throughout the world; all civilization was warned of its loss; \$250,000 reward was offered for information that would lead to the arrest and conviction of the thief; \$500,000 reward was offered for the delivery of the thief, secretly or otherwise, at the palace of the raja, with proof of his guilt, and \$1,000,000 for the safe and sure return of the jewel to its owner, and no questions asked.

The gem could not be disposed of, for it was known throughout the world by description, if not by sight. There was not another one like it in the world, and it was argued that even the thief might return it to the raja

with the sure knowledge that he would receive one million dollars for it, and still be permitted to go free.

The daily papers of London, Paris, Berlin, St. Petersburg, New York—indeed, of the world—contained columns about the ruby that had so mysteriously disappeared.

And on the very day that these notices appeared in the papers, one beautiful society woman of New York sat alone in the hidden chamber in the center of her house on the top floor, and gazed with fascinated eyes upon "The Goddess' Heart" that rested upon the black-plush covered table before her.

And now we will follow Nick Carter through his development of this mystery.

CHAPTER II.

A MILLION DOLLARS REWARD.

Nick Carter was not a dealer in precious stones, nor yet a great admirer of them; nevertheless, he had often heard, from one and another, about "The Goddess' Heart." He knew something of its supposed history; he was familiar with its unthinkable value. In a word, he knew of its existence in much the same way as you and I know about the "Kohrinor," or the "Great Mogul."

Therefore he read the article in his morning *Herald* to the end, and carefully. Then he laid the paper aside and gazed around the table at his two assistants, and upon Adelina, whose wit and intuitive talents he had learned to respect very highly.

"Have any of you ever heard of 'The Goddess' Heart'?" he asked tentatively. Not one of them had looked at a paper as yet.

It was Adelina who responded.

"I have," she said. "My father once visited the raja who owns it—Ghanmahr is his name, I think—and the ruby was shown to him. He described it as wonderful. For several years after that, it was his favorite topic of conversation. I remember that he said it was very nearly if not quite as large as the palm of my hand, with a depth almost equal to its width, and that it was shaped perfectly, like a heart."

The detective nodded.

"It has been stolen," he said briefly.

"Stolen?" exclaimed Adelina incredulously. "How was that possible? My father described to me how it was safeguarded. I remember that it required three keys, held by three different persons, to enter the room where it was kept, and that then there were three more keys, again held by three other persons, required to open an onyx box that contained it."

"Correct," said Nick. "At least, that is the way it is described here, and I have no doubt that it is correct. Nevertheless, it has been stolen."

"How?" asked Chick. "Did the thieves tear down the palace to get it, then?"

"Evidently not. Nothing was disturbed. The door of the room was found undisturbed; the onyx box was undisturbed, apparently; nevertheless, the ruby was missing when the raja went to it to exhibit it to Mr. J. Percival Gorman, who had traveled all the way to India expressly to see it."

"Isn't there a sort of legend about 'The Goddess' Heart' that carries out the idea that it was presented to the first raja of that race by a celestial visitor who brought it, already cut and polished, straight from heaven?" asked Patsy.

"Yes," replied Nick. "That, too, is given here, in the account of it."

"Then I should say that the celestial visitor has returned and taken it away again."

"That also is suggested here, in the paper. The subjects of the raja firmly believe that to be the only explanation of the mystery. They read, from the fact that it has been taken away again in the same manner in which it was brought to earth, a terrible omen of evil. The natives throughout India are holding special conclaves upon the subject, and the whole country is stirred to the depths by the incident. The stone was held by them to be sacred."

"I imagine that other parts of the world are pretty well stirred up about it, too," said Chick.

"You would think so indeed if you should read this paper," remarked the detective. "There are interviews here given by gem-fanciers and collectors throughout the world; by crowned heads, experts, tradesmen, jewelers, and so on ad libitum. If the Bank of England had been robbed of a million pounds sterling it could not have created a greater furor and excitement."

"Well, I don't know as it interests us particularly, does it?" asked Patsy. "Unless, indeed, the raja should take it in his head to cross the water and engage us to find it for him."

"Do you have an idea that you could do it, Patsy?" asked the detective, with a smile.

"Oh, I don't know. We have had just as difficult cases in the past, haven't we? There was the Orloff ruby, for instance. I don't believe this is much worse than that."

"Oh, yes, it is. This case will offer greater difficulties than that one did."

"Well, the raja isn't likely to seek us out to find it for him, is he?"

"I don't know. But it might be worth our while to look for it without waiting for him to ask us."

"How so?"

"Listen, and I will read something to you from the paper: 'The Raja Ghanmahr has on deposit with the Bank of England, through its Indian branch, over two

million pounds sterling. He offers the following rewards concerning the stolen ruby: Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in American money for information which will lead to the arrest and conviction of the thief; five hundred thousand dollars for the delivery of the thief, secretly or otherwise, at the palace of the raja, together with proof of guilt, and one million dollars for the safe return of the ruby to its owner, in which case he pledges himself that no questions will be asked and the person who returns it shall not be molested, nor his name given to the public.'"

"Whew!" whistled Patsy.

"That sounds as if he was very much in earnest," remarked Chick.

"It rings true," replied the detective.

"I think I would like to have a try at it," said Patsy, reaching out for the paper, and beginning to run rapidly over the article about the ruby.

"I wonder," remarked Adelina, gravely and thoughtfully, "if Rena Payson ever heard of that jewel? I suppose she has. At any rate, she is such an enthusiast, I would like to hear what she will have to say about it."

"You might call upon her this afternoon and ask her," suggested Nick. "I don't know of a better authority on the subject of precious stones than she is. There isn't a diamond or ruby or gem of any description in the world remarkable for its size or color, or value, that she doesn't know its history. Go and see her, Adelina. I haven't a doubt but that she can give you some valuable suggestions; that is, if you and Patsy think you would like to look for this one."

"What is the supposable value of it, anyhow?" asked Patsy, looking up for a moment from his paper.

"It is beyond price," returned the detective. "There has never been a value placed upon it, simply because it goes beyond the fortune of any man to purchase."

"Then what in the world could a man do with it? How could he dispose of it?"

"Nothing. He could not."

"Then what was the use in stealing it?"

"There could have been only one of just two motives for the robbers; possibly three, although the last is not to be seriously considered."

"What are they?"

"It might have been stolen for the sake of the reward that would be offered. We have it here: One million dollars, and no questions asked. If that was the motive, we will hear soon that it has been restored to the owner."

"What is the second motive?"

"A rich collector—one, for example, who has the same sort of passion for gems that is possessed by Mrs. Payson—might have found a way to get hold of it. In that case, it will be even more difficult to trace, for the double reason that the reward of a million dollars would have

no effect upon the thief and that it would be kept in the dark and in secret as long as the thief may live."

"You spoke about a third possible motive. What was that?"

"Revenge. I also said I did not think it was to be considered."

"I don't quite see where the question of revenge would come in."

"The raja might be a man who is well hated. He might have an enemy who could plot and plan for years to relieve him of his ruby, knowing that it was regarded as sacred, and that its loss would be the worst punishment the raja could be made to suffer. The idea is not tenable, however; nor is the first one reasonable."

"You cling to the second motive you mentioned, then?"

"Yes; I think so."

"That some collector has got it, eh?"

"That is the only apparently reasonable solution of the problem that offers itself to me just at the moment, Patsy."

"Why not a dealer? A buyer of precious stones?"

"Such a one is not likely to have the wit or the courage to have carried out such a scheme of theft. Again, while priceless in its present condition, the ruby, if broken up and recut, would not bring anywhere near the amount of the reward that is offered. A dealer would be wise to that fact."

"Which brings us back again to the collectors, eh?"

"Yes."

"I wonder if collectors of such things are generally known?" Chick asked musingly.

"Oh, yes. Among their own kind they are known by name, at least. For example, I haven't a doubt that Mrs. Payson could give you the name and the address of every collector of prominence in the world. I haven't a doubt that at one time and another she has been in communication with many of them; perhaps with all of them. You all know the value of her own collection, and that it has been brought from east, west, north, and south."

"Adelina," said Patsy, "when you go there this afternoon, just ask her that question, will you? If she does know a lot of collectors of gems, get her to give you a list of them. Tell her that the 'House of Carter' is at present very much interested in that stolen ruby and that we mean to have a shy at it—that is, if the chief is willing."

"Willing? Certainly. Anxious would be a better word. Who would not look about him for a million dollars in cash if he thought by looking he might find it? Just now, Patsy, since your marriage to this very sweet young woman on my right, you don't need the money as much as some of the rest of us——"

"Hush!" interrupted Adelina. "If he doesn't need the

money he does require the experience. And, besides, it isn't his money; it's mine."

"What's yours is mine, and what's mine is me own," laughed Patsy. "I'm going to make a bid for that million, anyhow."

"It looks to me," said the detective quietly, "as if there were a million and three-quarters in the thing."

"How do you make that out, chief?"

"Well, the reward of a million is addressed only to the thief in person. Now, if you should first give information which would lead to the arrest and conviction of the thief; next, if you should abduct the thief and carry him to India, and then afterward deliver the ruby, I don't see why you could not collect all three rewards."

"Are you joshing, or are you in earnest, chief?"

"I was never more in earnest in my life than now."

"All right. Here goes for the whole business, hook, line, bob, and sinker; the whole team with the horse behind and the dog under the wagon. Wow! I wonder if a fellow has got to go to India to begin the search?"

"Certainly not," replied the detective. "the ruby won't stay in India; at least, I don't think it will. You can work from this end as well as that. It is a case of theorizing, at the best, and you can do that here as well as there."

"I guess you're right, chief."

"Sure thing, Patsy."

CHAPTER III.

THE EXPOSITION OF THE GREAT RUBY.

Nick Carter repaired to his study alone, after that meal, to read the article in the *Herald* a second time. Somehow, it fascinated him; or, at least, it appealed to him strangely. He had the feeling that he was personally called upon to search for that ruby.

Why he should feel in that manner about it he did not know.

He had never heard of the raja by name before, and had scarcely heard of the ruby, save in the general way already referred to.

There was much that was interesting in the article, as he reread it, that he had not taken time to notice before, and he jotted down with his pencil several of the points that were interesting to him.

One of the things he noted particularly was the fact that the ruby was never visited, the onyx box never opened, save on certain state occasions, or when, as in the case of J. Percival Gorman, the banker and financier, it was exposed to the view of some privileged guest.

The state occasions upon which the box was opened, were the birthdays, respectively, of the reigning raja, and of his son, and of the eldest daughter.

On such occasions, it was taken from its bed of satin

and worn for an hour over the heart of the one of those three whose birthday it happened to be; after which it was returned to its nest, and the box was closed.

At the time of the visit of the banker to the palace, more than five months had elapsed since the ruby had been exposed—since the door of the sacred room had been opened, since any of the six keys necessary to access to the ruby had been used.

Nick regarded this as rather an important point, because it suggested that the ruby might have somehow been taken at the time it was last returned to its receptacle.

He made a note of the following:

"The last time the onyx box was opened and the ruby exposed to view was the occasion of the birthday of the raja's daughter Deehr, which happened five months to a day before the discovery that it was missing. At that time, as is the custom with the raja, there were many invited guests at the palace, to join in the festivities of Princess Deerha's birthday, and to see the glorious and wonderful ruby when for an hour it should blaze above her heart.

"When the hour during which the princess was permitted to wear the ruby had elapsed, 'The Goddess' Heart' was returned to its resting-place in the onyx box with great ceremony. A procession was formed in the Temple room, led by the high priest. Behind him walked the princess, leaning upon the arm of her father. Directly behind them came the two sons of the raja, then two younger daughters, and after them the immediate members of the household. These in turn were followed by the invited guests.

"The princess deposited the ruby in its bed herself, and her father closed down the lid of the box. Then one by one the keys were turned, first in the lock of the onyx box and then in the door of the sacred room, after which the entire party repaired to the banqueting-room."

"There doesn't seem to have been any chance for chicanery there," mused the detective, "and yet it would seem as if that were the only opportunity that has offered for purloining the jewel. If an imitation had been substituted, I should say that certainly it was done at that time, and also that Princess Deehra was mixed up in it, or was an innocent party to it, at least.

"But there was no substitute. The box, when it was opened, was empty, and so if the ruby was returned to the box at all—and there seems no doubt that it was, since there were so many pairs of eyes upon it at the time—it follows that there have been duplicate keys obtained by some person, to that room and to the box."

Here he made another note taken from the report in the paper:

"The complicated locks which protected the jewel are not the only safeguards that were placed over it. Night

and day, since time immemorial, there has been a guard on duty in the anteroom of the sacred chamber where the ruby was kept in its onyx box. This guard was changed every six hours, there being four of the raja's retainers especially detailed to that duty; and in order that there never might be danger that one of them would sleep at his post, each had six hours on duty and eighteen hours off duty, and for twelve of the eighteen hours off duty they were obliged to remain in their quarters and rest. Thus they had six hours of guard-duty, six hours for recreation, and twelve for rest."

"Of a surety," thought the detective, "every precaution was taken to guard the jewel, and whoever succeeded in taking it must have planned the coup for years.

"No one but a tireless and very wealthy collector could have accomplished it, and only such a person as that would have undertaken it."

Still another note from the article in the paper:

"There was an unusual number of invited guests at the palace the night of the Princess Deehra's birthday, and several foreigners were among them. This is unusual, for it is rarely that outsiders are invited to the palace on these occasions. Among them, it has been ascertained, were Colonel Sir Robert Bell Maitland and his wife, Lady Mildred, accompanied by a Miss Imogene Darling, evidently an American. Sir Robert, at present in England, was interviewed at his residence in Park Lane upon the subject, but he could add nothing to the information already obtained. He is only lately returned from India, where he has served with distinction during the past fourteen years. Asked about Miss Darling and the other foreigners who were present at the time, he said:

"Miss Darling was merely a friend who accompanied us, and could give you no more information on the subject than I can; probably not so much. There were, I think, three other foreigners besides ourselves present. I do not recall the names, save that they were a French marquis with his wife and daughter."

There seemed to be nothing that was even suggestive of a solution of the mystery in all this.

The ruby had been exposed, as had been the custom for centuries, on the occasion of the birthday of the eldest daughter of the house; it had been returned to its receptacle before the eyes of all, in the customary manner, and there the incident had closed.

Some time within the five months that succeeded that evening, the jewel was stolen, but it was as impossible to conjecture when the act might have been committed as it was to guess the name of the thief.

The detective pushed the paper from him and consigned the notes he had made to his pocket.

"I would like to know the name of that French marquis

and of the two women who were with him," he mused; "and also I would like to interview the knighted colonel and his wife and Miss Darling; for if the robbery was committed at or near that time, it is a safe proposition that one of the six had something to do with it; while if it was committed a month or three or four months later, there is little probability that any of them knew about it.

"I wonder if, by any chance, Colonel Sir Robert Bell Maitland is a collector of gems? I think I will ascertain that point at once."

He drew a blank toward him, and wrote out the following cablegram, addressing it to one of his friends at Scotland Yard, in London:

"Is Sir Robert Bell Maitland a collector of gems? Who is Imogene Darling, and where can she be found now? Ascertain if you can the names of the French Marquis and his wife and daughter, if they were such, in reference to great ruby robbery. Answer in full. CARTER."

In the meantime Adelina had taken her way to the home of Rena Payson, preferring not to wait till afternoon. The two had become friends during the past year, for Adelina had stood stoutly by Mrs. Payson in her troubles, and had encouraged her in her efforts to overcome her passion for jewels that were not her own, and which she could not obtain by purchase.

"So glad to see you, Adelina," said Mrs. Payson, as soon as Patsy's wife entered the room where she was. "I am so excited this morning that I don't know what to do. Have you by any chance read the papers to-day?"

"No," replied Adelina, "I haven't," which was truthful; but she had been told of the news which had evidently excited Mrs. Payson.

"Then you don't know about the missing ruby, do you?"

"Oh, yes. We discussed that at the breakfast-table this morning. What was it called? The 'Heart of a goddess,' or something like that?"

"The Goddess' Heart.' Yes. You see, Adelina, I know about all the great and precious stones in the world. It has been my hobby so long, and I have such a passion for them that I follow out the history of every one of them until I know it by heart."

"So you also know about this great ruby, do you?"

"Yes. Indeed I do," and her eyes glowed strangely.

"I am afraid," said Adelina, laughing, "that if 'The Goddess' Heart' came within your reach even now, Rena, you would fall from grace with a hard bump; no?"

"I am afraid so, too. I am glad that the temptation is not at hand, however. But, oh, to possess such a ruby as that one—— What rapture!"

"Really, Rena, you are quite too much of an enthusiast on those subjects, I think. Tell me about this particular ruby, won't you?"

"Well, its history is not as interesting or complicated as are the histories of most of the great rubies and diamonds in the world. For most of them, blood enough has been shed to float a ship, but for this particular one there has never, so far, been lost one drop of blood. For that reason it is regarded as somewhat sacred. Moreover, the legend in the family that owned it——"

"Pardon me; that *owns* it."

"To be sure. The legend in the family is to the effect that the first raja of the line was told to go to the top of a high mountain of the Himalayas and there to watch and pray during seven days and nights, without ceasing. At the end of that time he would receive a token from heaven, which as long as he preserved it in his family, and as long as his descendants could retain it, would bring them manifold blessings. The loss of it was to entail disaster and death upon them.

"The legend says that at the end of his fast and prayer, he fell into a swoon, and that when he awoke the figure of a spirit of the mountain was beside him.

"The spirit placed 'The Goddess' Heart' in his hand, gave him her blessing, and he departed down the mountain."

"How interesting; only, of course, it isn't true. But how long ago is all that supposed to have happened?"

"Many hundreds of years ago."

"Does any one suppose that a ruby can come out of the clouds, already polished?"

"The raja and his people believe it. We can at least admit that it is interesting."

"Assuredly. But now about the practical side of it. How in the world do you suppose it could have been stolen, Rena?"

Mrs. Payson shrugged her shoulders.

"It is impossible even to guess at that," she said. "Perhaps the daughter coveted it, and did not return it to its place in the onyx box."

"Oh, no; that cannot be so, for there were too many standing around to see it returned to its place, for that."

Rena Payson laughed aloud. Then she said:

"The only thing that remains to suppose, then, is that some one drugged six people, stole six keys, then drugged the seventh, who was on guard, and so entered the chamber and stole the jewel. Impossible on the face of it, isn't it?"

"I should say so."

"I think, my dear, that it must have evaporated, or melted. It was so old that perhaps it just disappeared. What do you think of that idea?"

CHAPTER IV.

AN INORDINATE PASSION FOR JEWELS.

"Have you ever been in India?" asked Adelina abruptly; and she was surprised at the sudden change in the

expression of Rena Payson's face. It was only an instantaneous flash, however, for almost at once she replied:

"Yes. I once visited my—that is, some friends who were staying there. It was a long time ago, though. It was the year I was married; twelve years ago."

"I should have thought you would have gone then to see the ruby, Rena."

"I did want to. My husband made some effort to get permission to see it, but he was unsuccessful. I always regretted it."

"I suppose you regarded it as the only opportunity you were ever likely to have?"

"Yes, I did. By the way, I have been wondering ever since I read the account in the paper this morning, what Mr. Carter would think about the theft of the ruby. Has he expressed an opinion?"

"Not a definite one."

"But he has discussed it?"

"Oh, yes; we all discussed it around the table."

"And what was the consensus of opinion among such talented detectives?"

"I don't think, as I said a moment ago, that there was anything very definite said about it. Patsy is quite taken with the affair. He thinks that he can find the ruby."

"Does he, really?"

"Yes; and he wanted me to ask you a question; to ask you if you would do him a favor."

"I certainly will if I can. What is it?"

"He said that having been a collector of jewels all your life you would naturally know the names and addresses of almost all the collectors of note in the world. He wanted me to ask you if you would give him a list of those you do know."

"Certainly I will; and I think I know about all of them; at least, all that are worthy the name of collectors."

She crossed the room to a small safe that stood in one corner—they were seated in her private sitting-room—and took from it a book bound in red leather. Then she rang for her secretary, and gave it into her hands, saying:

"Please make a typewritten copy of the names and addresses you will find in that book. When you have finished, bring it to me with the book." Then she turned again to Adelina, and added: "What does Patsy want with the list?"

"Well, he inclines to the belief that the ruby was stolen by some one of the rich collectors."

"Why?"

"It would be worthless to any one else. It could not be disposed of. It could not be broken up with profit, especially since the raja has offered a million dollars reward for its return and no questions asked."

"And for those reasons he believes that it was stolen by a collector?"

"Yes."

"But how was a collector to obtain it?"

"That, of course, it is impossible to say—now. He inclines to the belief that the robbery might have been the result of years of planning, where the plotter has moved so slowly that the motions have not been seen—like the hour-hand of a clock, don't you know?"

"Yes. I see the idea. It is ingenious. And still, I don't see how it could be carried out, do you?"

"No; but I do think that I understand something of Patsy's idea." Adelina purposely avoided bringing Nick Carter's name into the discussion, though why, she could not have told if she had been asked.

"Let me hear it, that is, if you are willing to tell it."

"There is no reason why I should not, as I know. He has not told me. I am only guessing. It is the idea upon which I should proceed if I were following up the case myself."

"I declare, Adelina, living with detectives is developing you into one very rapidly."

"Oh, yes; I expect I will be one myself, after a little, although I shall not be like the others."

"No? What sort will you be?"

"I don't know whether you would call it clairvoyant, or merely intuitive; but sometimes I seem to see things quite clearly when there is no apparent reason why I should. For instance, I was almost sure, a moment ago, from the expression of your eyes when I asked the question, that you had at some time seen the ruby—"The Goddess' Heart," you know; only, of course, when you explained to me that you had only tried to see it and had been disappointed, I understood."

"I declare, Adelina, sometimes you give me the shivers, with your uncanny ways. Now tell me what you think about Patsy's idea."

"Well, it is something like this: There are six keys to those locks where the ruby was kept; three to the door of the room and three more to the onyx box."

"Yes."

"Now, suppose that a collector made up his mind ten years ago to possess that ruby and began his plotting and planning at once. Suppose he gave a year to obtaining an impression of each key; eh? that would take only six years, and six years with the consequent expense would be nothing to a man like that, with such a purpose in view. Don't you agree with me?"

Rena was looking at Adelina with fascinated gaze; but now, when the question was asked, she laughed aloud.

"Why, yes," she said. "I quite agree with you, of course."

"There would remain, then, three more years during which to think out a plan for getting past the guard at the door, and another—which I should have mentioned

first—of getting himself invited to the palace during one of those state functions which are celebrated at the birthdays of three members of the family."

Mrs. Payson rose abruptly and crossed to the opposite side of the room, where she helped herself to a glass of water. Then she returned to her chair, smiling.

"Really, Adelina, you should go in for writing romances. You have the gift," she said.

"I have thought so, sometimes. But to continue."

"Certainly. Continue."

"It seems that there were six foreigners at that particular function which happened five months ago—the last time the ruby was seen by any one except the thief."

"Were there—as many as that?—I did not notice."

"Yes. A Colonel Sir Robert Bell Maitland with his wife and a friend named Imogene Darling; and there was also a Frenchman there with two ladies. I think Patsy means to look all those people up, eventually."

"But, my dear, what possible connection could they have with the matter?"

"I am only carrying out the theory that I am guessing Patsy has got into his head."

"Oh. I see."

"That is what I would do if I were working on the case. By the way, is that Colonel Maitland on your list of collectors?"

"No. I don't think so."

"It's too bad, isn't it? If he only were, it would seem, as if—perhaps his wife's name, or Miss Darling's, is there."

"No; I am sure that neither of them is on the list."

"Then that Frenchman must be."

"Very likely; only we don't happen to know his name, do we?"

"No. It wasn't in the paper. However, I think the chief has cabled to get it."

"Has cabled—to get—what?"

The name of the French marquis and the ladies who were with him; and the address of Miss Darling, also. I am quite sure he has."

"Do you mean to tell me that Nick Carter has seriously taken hold of this case, Adelina?"

"I believe he has. It seemed to interest him strangely. I suppose, however, it was purely in a metaphysical sense that it did so. Anything of the sort that offers unusual difficulties appeal to him, you know."

"I suppose the million dollars reward is attractive, too."

"Naturally. He thought—"

"Who thought? Of whom are you speaking now?"

"Of the chief; of Nick Carter."

"Well, what were you saying?"

"He suggested that inasmuch as I was coming around

to see you to-day, you might possibly be able to make suggestions about the case. Being so interested in jewels, and knowing about them so thoroughly, as well as about the people who collect them, you might hit upon the very person who would have the strength of purpose, the courage, and the lack of conscience to conceive and carry out a scheme such as this one must have been."

This time Rena laughed heartily.

"Really, Adelina," she said, "Nick Carter does me too much honor. Tell him that I can think of but one person who might have done all that, and that she has gone out of the business."

"Do you mean yourself?"

"Yes."

"But you could never have planned and carried out such a thing as that, Rena!"

"No; but if such a thing as you suggest was planned and carried out, it was done, and you may depend upon it, by some person who has the same inordinate love of jewels that I possess, or, rather, that possesses me. Any one who is less a worshiper at their shrine could not accomplish it. Any one who did not make it a life's passion would falter at the task long before it could be completed."

"But you haven't been in India in twelve years. You were never there but once, were you?"

"No."

"Do you know among the collectors another such as you describe?"

"No; I do not; although I have no doubt there are many."

"Do you think so?"

"It is only natural. Those other collectors know of my name and address as well as I know of theirs; but they do not know how the infatuation possesses me at times. They do not know how enthralled I become. They do not know that I deliberately stole, from my best friends in order to gratify that passion."

"Hush! You must not talk about that, Rena."

"Sometimes I like to talk about it—to you. It isn't nice to be a thief; to know that you are a thief; to feel that whether you keep on stealing or not, you are all the while as much a thief as ever, at heart."

"You don't mean to tell me that you still have moments when you covet the— I won't believe it, Rena."

"Believe it or not, it is true. That I control it is only because my will is stronger than my desires."

"I think I had better send the chief around to see you, to cheer you up, Rena," said Adelina, rising, for the secretary at that moment brought in the copied list of names."

"Do. I should like to have a chat with him."

"About the ruby?"

"Yes; about the ruby."

"I will tell him to come."

CHAPTER V.

NICK CARTER'S PROCESS OF INDUCTION.

It was evening of the following day when Nick Carter received a reply to his cable. We will quote it exactly as it read:

"Sir Robert Bell Maitland is not a collector of gems. He is a genuine type of the English army officer who has served long in India. Wouldn't know a diamond from paste. Same can be said of Lady Maitland. Imogene Darling is an American young woman who occasionally visits them. Visited them in India frequently. Is some relation. Don't know what, and cannot get her address. Marquis de Plantois, the marquise, and daughter Aimee. None of these are collectors. Think you are on the wrong scent. Glad you have taken the thing in hand. Wish I might. Command me at any time.

"HENDERSON."

"I don't know why it is," mused the detective, "that the young woman by the name of Imogene Darling seems to stick in my crop all the time; but she does."

That evening he called at the Paysons', finding Herbert and his wife both at home, and delighted to see him.

Almost at once the subject of the ruby came up. It seemed to "possess" Mrs. Payson almost as much as it did Nick.

"Do you really think that you can succeed in finding that ruby, Mr. Carter?" she asked, after the usual remarks had been made about it.

"I don't know. Probably not; but all the same I have made up my mind to have a try at it. You see, I have been more or less successful throughout my life, and there is nothing that attracts me so thoroughly as a difficult matter like this one."

"I should suppose that in order to follow it up in the correct way you would have to go out to India," said Rena. "I have always understood that detectives worked by finding some sort of clue on the premises. Now, if you were there, at the raja's palace, and should examine the keys, for instance, might they not tell you something? Of course I don't mean the keys, particularly, but you know what I do mean, don't you?"

"Yes," replied Nick, smiling, "I think I understand. No, I don't exactly see how it would benefit me to be on the premises. I have been working the thing out at home, by induction."

"Induction!" she laughed. "I always thought it was *de*-duction that detectives made use of."

"Induction will sometimes serve better than *de*-duction, my dear Mrs. Payson."

"For example?"

"Well, for example; this particular case. The process of induction is arrived at by the effort of putting yourself in the place of the other fellow."

"Do you refer now to the man who stole the ruby?"

"Yes—or the woman."

"Do you think, then, that it might have been a woman?"

"It might have been. I think it is more than likely that it was a woman. I have arrived at that conclusion by the process of *in*-duction, as you call it."

"Will you tell me how? I am very deeply interested, Mr. Carter."

"If you will tell me why you are particularly interested, I will endeavor to explain. That is fair, isn't it?"

"I don't know whether it is or not. You see, that brings it down to a personal matter, and I have not forgotten that it is only a little more than a year since you were looking for me in much the same manner."

"Mrs. Payson, I hope you don't think that I was referring to anything so unpleasant as that."

"Certainly not. I understand you perfectly, Mr. Carter. I am interested, then, first, because it is not long since I was in the same boat as the person who now has the great ruby; second, because it is a great and matchless ruby that is concerned, and, third, because I feel an interest in your work and in your methods of doing it."

"Thank you, Mrs. Payson."

"And now tell me why you think the ruby was stolen by a woman."

"In arriving at a conclusion by the process of induction, Mrs. Payson, the first course is to eliminate all impossible and nearly all the improbable quantities."

"Yes."

"I begin, then, with the improbable ones. I find, first, that it is not likely that any of the immediate household of the raja was concerned in the robbery, for the reason that all India has for years regarded that particular ruby with superstitious awe; that if a servant or a retainer or a compatriot of the raja had sought to possess himself of it, he would have been compelled to engage confederates, and the enormous sum offered as a reward for its recovery would have betrayed the thief long before this.

"I find, in the second place, that if it were not a servant or a retainer or a countryman of the raja who stole the jewel, then it must have been taken by a member of his own family, or by an invited guest.

"I give attention first to the members of the family.

"The elder son would not have taken it because it is practically his property now. He, as well as his brothers and sisters, regard it with religious awe. There is no reason why any of them should covet it, since it is already theirs, and they are so enormously rich that the value of it would not be an inducement under any circumstances; and there again we are reminded of the impossibility of disposing of it. So I eliminate the members of the family."

"Might not the daughter—what is her name? Oh, Deehra—might she not have taken it for a lover, say?"

"No; not by my process of thought. I eliminate the family."

"Very well. That leaves only the guests. But why?"

"I am coming to that. I find, therefore, third, that the jewel could not have been taken from its place of sequestration when only the family and the immediate retainers of the raja were in the palace."

"I don't understand."

"It is simple enough. If I eliminate the family, the servants and retainers, and the members of the raja's household and estates, and attribute the crime to a stranger, it follows as naturally as day follows night that the stranger who did take it must have been at the palace when other strangers were also there."

"If a stranger had gone there also, even by stealth, for the purpose of stealing the ruby, his or her presence must have been noted and commented upon; and now, when the calamity has happened, it would be remembered."

"Yes."

"I find, therefore, the fourth count, which is that the ruby was stolen at a time when several guests at least were at the palace. I wonder if you will excuse me if I tell you that I have ventured to take a great liberty with your personality?"

"Why, what do you mean, Mr. Carter?"

"I mean this: You are a collector of jewels; you are passionately fond of them; they fascinate you as nothing else can."

"That is quite true."

"Very well; in my process of induction I have taken the questionable liberty of asking myself what course you would pursue if you had plotted and planned to that very end."

"If?"

"Yes. You see, in following out induction, one has to have a bearing to go by, as a sailor would say. I took you for my bearing. But I have not quite come to that yet. I will do so in a moment."

"You amaze me."

"If I do not offend you, all right. Understand, I have only used your personality in this matter as a sort of keedge-anchor, to haul myself up by. See?"

"I don't think I do—quite—but I will be patient."

"To return, then, to the guests. The only time that we are told about when there were any guests at the palace—foreigners, I mean—was on the occasion of the Princess Deehra's birthday, five months ago, when the ruby was exhibited and worn by her. At that time there were six foreigners at the palace; two gentlemen and four ladies."

"Yes. That was all in the paper yesterday morning."

"Exactly. Now, one of the gentlemen was a certain

Marquis de Plantois, accompanied by his wife and daughter. By a happy accident, I happen to know, personally, the marquis and both the ladies who were with him. I have been entertained at his house in Paris, and at his chateau in Brittany. Knowing them as I do, I have no doubt of my ability in eliminating all of them from the possibility of association with this crime. That is conclusive as far as it goes, isn't it?"

"Decidedly so."

"That leaves me only three guests to consider; and the names of those three, as you know, are Colonel Sir Robert Bell Maitland, of the British army, who was accompanied by his wife, who is Lady Mildred Maitland, and by a young woman who is an American, whose name is—as far as we know—Imogene Darling."

"Well, you seem to be getting warm, as children say."

"I think I am. I don't know, of course. I cabled for information about those three, to a friend of mine at Scotland Yard. He informs me that Colonel Maitland is out of the running entirely so far as this is concerned; he is equally certain about the wife, Lady Maitland; but he offers no comment whatever about the young woman from America—Miss Darling."

"And so you jump at once to the conclusion that she is the guilty party! How interesting, Mr. Carter!"

"No; I do not jump at it, but I do arrive at it, as you will presently see."

"Well?"

"If you will read again the account of the affair as published in yesterday's *Herald*, you will notice that the English colonel was extremely reticent in regard to Miss Darling. My friend Henderson, of Scotland Yard, found him still more so in regard to her. All that he could tell me was that she had visited the Maitlands frequently while they were in India, which covered a period of fourteen years. He was also under the impression that she is a relative. But at all events I have eliminated, by the process of induction, every name on that list of guests at the birthday function, save only that of Miss Darling."

"And, finding it impossible to eliminate her, you decide offhand that she is guilty?"

"No. I decide that she is the only one of that list of guests who is possibly guilty. I do not say probably, even; but possibly."

"Poor Miss Darling!"

"On the contrary, in order to carry out my process, she must be a very rich Miss Darling. And now we come to the point where I have taken liberties with your personality, Mrs. Payson."

"Please tell me what you mean. I do not at all understand."

"Well, in the first place, if Miss Darling is the guilty one, she must be a very rich young woman; she must also have a passion for game that is equal if not greater

than your own; she must be daring, fearless, self-reliant, resourceful, determined. You are the possessor of all those qualities, so I have said to myself: 'I will put Mrs. Payson in Miss Darling's place, and I will ask myself what Mrs. Payson would do if she were situated as Miss Darling was, and had determined to possess herself of that ruby?' 'By adopting that course, I have a personality before me that I can work upon. I know you, and I can estimate nearly what you would do under given conditions. I do not know Miss Darling. But if I can use you as a pattern to cut my cloth, I can very nearly make a fit. That is *in-duction*.'

CHAPTER VI.

A STUPENDOUS AND DARING PLOT.

"I think I understand you," said Mrs. Payson. "You use me very much as a duck-hunter uses a decoy. You are trying to gage her character and her action by what you believe mine would have been under the same circumstances."

"Precisely that. You have explained it more clearly in one sentence than I did in a dozen."

"You were trying to apologize and to explain at the same time. A difficult feat under any circumstances."

"I guess you are right."

"Well, what do you make out of the comparison, Mr. Carter?"

"You are a rich woman; Miss Darling, in order to fill the requirements I demand of her, must also be a very rich young woman. You possess the qualities of daring to carry out a thing of that sort, once you had decided upon it; Miss Darling must also have possessed them. You are a worshiper of gems and jewels and precious stones, and have, I do not doubt, at some time, coveted 'The Goddess' Heart.' Miss Darling must be also a worshiper at the shrine, and must have coveted the gem, unless I eliminate her as well as the others; so I put you in her place; I forget for the moment that there is such a person as Miss Darling, and I ask myself in plain words: 'What would Mrs. Payson have done to carry out such a scheme? How would she have plotted and planned? What course would she have pursued? And when the time came for the grand and final act of the drama, how would she have staged it?' or words to that effect? Do you understand me?"

"Yes. It is all very interesting."

"First, then, 'The Goddess' Heart' is not a new thing. It is a very old one. It has been known to gem-fanciers for centuries. You, having been a gem-worshiper since your childhood, must have known about 'The Goddess' Heart' for many years; since long before you were married; since you first took up the study of precious stones."

"You are correct about that; I have. I have known about it since my childhood."

"Therefore you would have coveted it all your life, practically. It is about twelve years ago, I think, that you inherited many millions from your father. If at that time you had decided in your own mind that you would use some of that wealth in obtaining possession of that jewel, how would you have planned to do it?"

"Are you asking me that question?"

"No; not at all. I am asking myself that question. I am trying to read Miss Darling through you."

"Go on, please."

"You would have known, even then, that the ruby could not be purchased; you would have realized even then that if it was ever obtained, it could only be gotten by theft; and if, at that time, you had determined to get it, even by theft, you would have begun planning in a clear-headed, cold-blooded manner, knowing that it would take years to accomplish what you had set your mind to do."

"I am afraid, Mr. Carter, that you are giving me credit for altogether too much talent."

"Possibly; but it pleases me to do so, for the sake of my argument."

"Well?"

"You would first have studied out the manner in which the ruby was safeguarded. You would have posted yourself thoroughly in regard to the onyx box with the three keys, the sacred room with its three keys, the ever-present guard at the door of the sacred room; the interior of the palace itself, the approaches to it, the number and character and habits of those who live within its walls, the means of access to the neighborhood, the frequency or infrequency with which the ruby was exhibited, and the opportunities that might be directed or created for becoming an invited guest within the palace itself."

"These things alone, that I have already enumerated, might have—may have taken years to accomplish; I mean two or three; possibly it might have been done in one, since most of it was outside work."

Mrs. Payson was leaning forward toward the detective, completely absorbed by his words. Her elbow was on her knee, her chin in her hand.

"What would have been the next move on the board?" she demanded presently.

"The keys, Mrs. Payson. It would be necessary to obtain an impression of six different keys, one of which is carried by the raja himself, another by his son, another by the high priest, another by the princess, and so on; you know the list as well as I."

"Yes."

"On the face of it this would seem like an insurmountable obstacle, but nothing is insurmountable by a deter-

mined woman. They are much greater than men in that respect."

"I must confess that I cannot now imagine how it could be done," she murmured.

"It could be accomplished only in one way. There is no other."

"And that one is—what?"

"Bribery."

"But how could even that be resorted to, Mr. Carter?"

"Again only in one way; by degrees. One key at a time. One key a year, or one in two years, or two keys in three years."

"I don't think I follow you."

"A pessimist has said that every man has his price. It isn't true, but it is an unfortunate thing that many men have a price. I think if you should set out to accomplish a thing like that, you would make use of your witchery first, and your money afterward. You would have induced some India army officer to introduce you into the house of the raja, or you would have managed to get in with the raja's company when they were away from the palace. You would have discovered some method of approaching his body-servant, and with your witchery and by the use of a great sum of money you would have enjoyed him into bringing you that key for a moment, 'just to look at.' With a little wax in the palm of your hand, the impression would be obtained, and the first, and, apparently, the most difficult obstacle would have been overcome.

"You might have to wait another year, or two years, for another impression of another key, but practise would have made you perfect, and success would have given you courage. You would be bolder and more confident in the future; but I think that is the manner after which you would have worked, and, therefore, I give Miss Darling credit for having done the same thing. Ultimately, even though it took twenty years, the impressions of the six keys would have been obtained, and the six keys made, ready for use."

"Ah! Ready for use. But it strikes me, Mr. Carter, that, even with the keys ready for use, the most difficult part of the adventure was yet to be performed."

"Decidedly."

"There is the palace to enter; the guard at the door of the sacred room to pass."

"That, my dear Mrs. Payson, would be where you would excel. That would be where you were at your best, just as Miss Darling was at her best, doubtless."

"How?"

"I will cling to you a little longer, if I may."

"Certainly. I rather like it. It is exciting. I almost regret that I did not think of it all, since I might have done it so well."

"You would have made use of the same gallant officer who assisted you unwittingly before, and you would

have induced him to use his influence to obtain an invitation to be present at one of the birthday functions when the ruby was exposed. You would have selected that time, knowing that it was not likely to be exposed again for many months, and that, therefore, a long time must elapse, if you were successful, before the theft would be discovered."

"Having secured the invitation through your relative in the British army, you would presently find yourself in the palace of the raja; the first step of the last act accomplished."

"Beautiful! Go on."

"The old raja, or one of his sons, or a majordomo of the place would be induced to conduct you over the palace, and so you would presently be better informed regarding the approaches to the door of the sacred room wherein the onyx box is kept. You would have with you a supply of sweets—candies, we would call them here—properly and carefully doctored, to induce sleep. You would follow the procession to the sacred room when the ruby was returned to its onyx safe after the hour of exposition on the bosom of the princess; you would follow them all to the banqueting-hall immediately thereafter, but after the banquet was over, when midnight was passed and you knew the guard over the ruby had been changed, you would manage to detach yourself from the others long enough to wander toward the door of the sacred room again.

"You would explain to the guard that you had lost your way, for by this time you would have learned to speak Hindustanee fairly well, and all the time you were talking to him you would be eating sweets. He would direct you how to find your way back to the company, and you would eat more sweets while you were thanking him. Then you would drop a gold piece into his hand, together with a handful of the sweets; not those you were eating, but the ones that were doctored—and you would return to the company.

"Hours later, at three or four o'clock in the morning, you would glide noiselessly along the palace corridors to the door of the sacred room."

"Your keys would be in your grasp, and, finding the guard asleep, you would pass him and enter."

"The keys you would have numbered carefully, and studied so there would be no mistake or delay, and presently you would glide out of the sacred room again, leaving everything exactly as you found it, only that the ruby, 'The Goddess' Heart,' would be in your possession."

"You would pass the guard swiftly, and return to your own apartments in the palace, hugging the great ruby to your heart, and the thing that had taken many years to perform would be accomplished."

"On the morrow you would feel perfectly secure, for you would know that months would elapse before the

time for another exposition of the ruby. The guard whom you had drugged, if he realized at all that he had been drugged, which is improbable, would be careful not to tell that he had slept at his post.

"You would doubtless be brave enough to accept the raja's invitation to remain a few days or a week at the palace, and then, by easy stages, you would return to the coast, and thence to your home in America.

"Now, Mrs. Payson, that is the end of my romance. That it is a romance, you must admit, but upon my word it is the only logical method by which that ruby could have been stolen as it was; and that is why I think it was a woman who stole it, and why I believe that the woman was Miss Imogene Darling, who went to the birthday-function of the Princess Deehra five months ago."

"And are you going ahead with the case on that basis, Mr. Carter?"

"Oh, I shall probably drop it altogether. I find that in order to do the proper tracing and trailing, I would have to go to India, and to England, and I don't know where else."

"You make me almost wish that I might know Miss Darling," she laughed.

"Why? Because of her courage in carrying out such a stupendous plot?"

"No; because I would like to see the ruby."

"Oh."

"There is one thing that strikes me as strange, however."

"What is that?" asked Nick.

"I have never heard or seen the name of Imogene Darling mentioned in connection with the collection of precious stones."

"Certainly not. You don't suppose, do you, that she would do such things under her own name? Imogene Darling was a name assumed for the occasion."

CHAPTER VII.

NICK CARTER'S FLIGHT TO INDIA.

The reader must be made to understand that although Nick Carter had used Mrs. Payson—as he expressed it—as a bearing to steer by, he did not for one moment suspect that she had any connection with the case. He merely looked upon the woman who was known by the name of Imogene Darling, as another of the same character, habits, and passions as Herbert Payson's beautiful wife.

The motives and incentives of "Gem-worshippers" were so far outside his ken, so far removed from the regular sort of thing that one encounters in every-day life, that he felt that he was forced to study one of them, whom he knew to be such and who was near at hand, in

order to read the character of that other one whom he supposed he had never seen.

It was somewhat in the form of a mathematical proposition, after all.

In going over the story as he had done, in putting Rena Payson in the place of that other woman whom he did not know, he was using a human being to study another one, just as naval officers make use of the model of a war-vessel, in a tank, in order to discover what the completed ship will do under given conditions.

And, again, in repeating the story to her as he had thought it out, he was assisting his own brain to think more deeply upon the problems at hand.

Arrived at his home after the interview with the Paysons, he called his two assistants and Adelina to him in the study.

"Chick," he said, then, "I am going away, out of the country, to-morrow morning early. I shall take Patsy and Adelina with me as far as Southampton, from whence they will go up to London. I shall continue on to India. I shall go by rail across the continent of Europe, and will make all the speed I can on my journey, so that no time will be lost. Patsy and Adelina will await my return in London."

"What am I to do?" asked Chick.

"You are to remain here in charge of the business, and be prepared to act upon any message that you may receive from me, or from Patsy. I only want one thing thoroughly understood, and that is, that no matter what happens in the meantime, you are not to act in this matter until I return, or, at least, without consulting me."

"Very well."

"If by any chance the identity of Imogene Darling should be discovered by you or Patsy before my return, do nothing whatever about it, unless it is with my approval."

"And if questions are asked about your absence, or Patsy's?"

"Merely reply as evasively as you can. I cannot tell just how long a time we will be absent; only that I shall waste no time, and will return here as soon as possible."

During the voyage across the ocean Nick and Patsy frequently discussed the case in hand, and whenever they did so, Adelina was always an attentive listener, now and then putting in a word or a question that showed that she was as deeply interested in the case as they were.

"Your duties in England," the detective said to them on one occasion, "will consist merely in tracing out carefully the family histories of Colonel Sir Robert Bell Maitland and his wife, Lady Mildred. I want to know to whom they are related, particularly in our own country, for among the kindred of one of them, either by blood or by marriage, I am convinced that we will find

that young woman who passed under the name of Imogene Darling.

"Don't misunderstand me. I have no idea that you will find the name of Darling anywhere associated with them, save as a frequent guest, as Inspector Henderson cabled; but I am convinced that ultimately we will find that Imogene Darling, under her own name, is a cousin, or a nearer relative, of one of them.

"You must make some effort, also, to ascertain if anywhere there is a picture of this Miss Darling. It is more than likely that she has had her picture in one of the papers, at one time or another. It is likely that by searching the files of the society reports you will find paragraphs about her as a guest of the Maitlands.

The thing that I wish to know is everything that can be discovered about Miss Darling and her association with the Maitlands.

"If you can get into society and get to know the Maitlands, so much the better. It will facilitate you greatly.

"But, finally, I have the same instructions to give you that I gave to Chick: Do nothing, no matter what happens, without consulting me. I shall return to London just as quickly as it can be done."

When Nick arrived at Bombay he began carefully to make inquiries.

The excitement relative to the theft of "The Goddess Heart" had by no means died down. The wonderful mystery about it was as much talked about as ever, and he had little difficulty in discovering all he wished to know about the raja, without asking questions; and these latter might have been awkward, since he wished to keep secret the fact that he was interested in the case more than as a spectator eager to hear all the gossip.

The estates and the palace of the raja, he discovered, were located in the lower part of Central India, among the smaller mountains of that section. He heard the place everywhere referred to as a spot of second Nirvana, so beautiful was it; and the Raja Gahnmaur was spoken of as one of the richest of the Indian potentates.

To arrive at the palace of the raja he would have to go by train to a place called Bhopal, a distance of approximately six hundred miles, and thence by carriage or on horseback a distance of only about twenty miles to the palace.

But there were other things to be investigated before he went to the palace of the raja, and to accomplish these he sought out an old acquaintance of his who was in the service of the government in a civil capacity.

Sir John Montgomery prided himself that he knew something about every Englishman in India. He was a regular encyclopedia of information, and his long service in the country and his still longer memory, Nick thought, would prove invaluable.

Fortunately he was not obliged to go very far to find

his friend, for Sir John was at that time stationed at Poona, near Bombay.

We will pass over the meeting of the two comrades whose relative ages might have represented father and son, but who, nevertheless, were as warm friends as if they belonged to the same generation. Sir John was overjoyed to see Nick, and said so.

"You see," said the detective, after the greeting and the usual small talk consequent upon the meeting were over, "I am here on rather a delicate mission, and you are such a mine of information, Sir John, that I have come directly to you from the ship that brought me here."

"That's right. That's right. It is the thing you should have done, anyhow. Now, what is it that you want me to tell you?"

"First, do you know Colonel Maitland—Sir Robert Bell Maitland in private life? Have you a personal acquaintance with him?"

"Know him? I should say so. Personal acquaintance? Well, rather! Bob Maitland and I were at Eton together as boys, and we have been as close friends ever since as we were then."

"I did not suppose he was as old as you," ventured the detective.

"What, Bob? I think he is a few months older than I, as a matter of fact. But he isn't here now. He's back in England; has applied, I believe, for his retirement. I suppose his wife had something to do with that—and I don't blame her. But what do you want to know about Bob? He hasn't been doing anything to get you after him, has he?"

"No, no. Not at all. I am looking up a bit of family history, that is all. I want to know, first, who he married, if you please."

"Who he married? First time or second, Carter?"

"Second, I think, if he has been married twice."

"Yes. His first wife lived only about five years. She left him two sons, now married men themselves. Five years after her death—that would be about twenty years ago—he married again. Lady Mildred is an American. Bob was military attaché at Washington when he married her."

"Do you happen to know what her maiden name was?"

"No. I don't think I ever heard it."

"But you are sure that she was an American?"

"Oh, yes."

"Did you ever happen to meet an acquaintance of theirs—possibly a relative of Lady Maitland's—who visited them frequently, named Imogene Darling?"

"No; I never met the young lady, although I have heard enough about her."

"What did you hear about her?"

"Why, the whole army—that is, as much of the army

as saw her—went mad over her. She was a raving beauty, as nearly as I can make out.”

“Some sort of a relative to Lady Maitland? No?”

“A cousin, I have heard, two or three times removed.”

“She was an American, of course?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Was she here often? In India, I mean?”

“I have understood that she paid a visit here about every year.”

“Since how long ago? Can you tell me that?”

“Why, I can guess at it. Let me see. Bob came here to India fourteen years ago last May. I think that Miss Darling paid them a visit that same year, or the one following. She has been coming ever since.”

“Do, you suppose, Sir John, that there is a photograph of her anywhere in the country that I could see?”

“I suppose, as a matter of fact, that there are several hundreds of them; snap shots, I mean, that were taken surreptitiously, by the officers at one time and another. If you could happen to run across one of those chaps who were gone on her, don’t you know, you would have no difficulty about seeing a likeness of her. The strange thing about her was that she never married. I can’t understand it. A young woman as beautiful as she is to remain single in the face of all the opportunities she had—it’s an outrage against mankind. That’s what I call it! Why, she was here less than a year ago—six months ago, or thereabouts; it was when Bob got his discharge, and young Lord Covington was mad about her. Rumor says that he proposed to her over and over again; but she wouldn’t have him. And Lord Algy is a catch, too. Has a rent-roll as long as your leg, and all that. A fine fellow, too.”

“Have you ever heard a fair description of her, so that you could repeat it?”

“Lord! I’ve heard lots of them; but as for repeating them—that’s another thing. If I were twenty years younger, or thirty, I might be better able to do it.”

“Well, do the best you can.”

“Oh, I’m not good at that sort of thing. Blue eyes that look black at times; long lashes, straight brows; beautiful hair that’s brown with a touch of copper in it; perfect figure and a laugh like silver bells. You know the type. A smile that makes you dizzy, and a way with her that bewitched the men to her feet in swarms.”

“A flirt?”

“No; I never have heard her accused of anything that wasn’t perfectly proper and right. Bob wouldn’t have stood for anything else, you know.”

“What time of year was she in the habit of coming here. Sir John?”

“During our summer, when everybody who can goes up into the hills, you know. Bob always had his leave about the time she came and they used to go to a bungalow of his somewhere in Central India; near

Bhopal, I think it was. I was never there. Miss Darling made a good many friends among the high-caste natives, I have heard. She was on quite intimate terms with the daughter of one raja, I’ve been told, although I don’t know who it was.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS MISS DARLING.

“I wonder,” said the detective, after a short pause, “if you could manage somehow to introduce me to one of the officers who would be likely to have a picture of her, and if you could induce him to produce it without letting him know that I desired to see it?”

“I might—if I knew why you are interested in her. If you are chasing her up for anything at all that is going to reflect upon her, or her friends, I wouldn’t help you by so much as a turn of my hand.”

“Well, I’ll be honest with you, Sir John. I don’t know whether I am or not. I am quite as anxious to prove that she is *not* the one I wish to find, as you would be. But I am looking for somebody, and I am inclined to think that she is the one.”

“Anything bad?”

“Rather bad; yes.”

“Tell me what it is, and then if I see my way clear to help you, I’ll do it.”

“I tell you of course, in confidence?”

“Certainly.”

“I am after the person who stole ‘The Goddess’ Heart,’ and I am inclined to think that Miss Darling is the one who did it.”

For a moment Sir John stared at the detective in undisguised surprise. Then he burst into a roar of laughter which lasted until there were tears in his eyes.

“Well, I’ll be blowed!” he exclaimed at last. “Carter, I always thought that you were one of the masters at your trade, but that is a fool proposition you are on now. But if you’ve got such a bee as that buzzing in your bonnet, sure I’ll help you, if only, for the sake of proving that you are mistaken. How the devil could a young woman like that get past all those doors, and all that; hey? Come along. I’ll go back to Bombay with you on the train and take you to the club.”

“Understand, Sir John, my mission here, and my interest in the young lady, are not to be made known to anybody.”

“Sure not. I shouldn’t think you *would* want it known. I wouldn’t, if I were you.”

At the club in Bombay that same evening Nick was introduced to many of the army officers who were there, and presently with two of them he and Sir John seated themselves to a late supper, Nick understanding that

from these two was to be obtained the information he sought.

"I suppose you fellows are heartbroken over the fact that Bob Maitland has gone back for good, aren't you?" Sir John asked, when there was a lull in the conversation. "It means, doesn't it, that not one of you will ever see Miss Darling again?"

"I think it is a good thing that we will not," said Lord Algy Covington lugubriously. "I was hard hit there, Monty, and I haven't got over it yet. But I'll say this for her: She treated me white; never led me on a single step; gave me to understand half a dozen times, without saying it in words, that it was no use; but, Lord-bless you! I walked right up to the batter just the same."

"I never even saw her," said Sir John. "Have you got a picture of her, Algy?"

"Yes; one that I got on the quiet, without her knowing it. She was dead set against having her picture taken. But I can't show it to you, old man. Sorry."

"Why not?"

"It wouldn't be exactly square, you know. I have never shown it to anybody, and I never shall."

"How about you, Trevanion?" asked Sir John, turning to the other officer.

"Same here, Monty. I've got one, also, but I couldn't show it to you if I would—which I wouldn't—for the reason that it is in my kit, down in the hot country, at Mysore."

"Evidently," said the detective dryly, "the young lady is very beautiful."

"Beautiful?" exclaimed Jack Trevanion. "She is the sweetest thing that ever happened! And not so young, either. She told me herself, last August, that she was thirty-one. That is only two years younger than I am; but she looks twenty-one."

"I call it unkind that you won't let an old fellow like me see a picture of her," said Sir John. "Come, Algy, let me see yours. I'll wager that you have it with you at this moment."

"So I have. I'll not deny it. I could pick out a score of fellows in India now who carry a picture of her somewhere about their persons; a picture obtained in the same way that my own was; but I'll give you odds of a hundred pounds against ten that you couldn't induce one of them to show it to you."

"What was the secret of her fascination over all of you?" asked Nick. "Her beauty?"

"Possibly that had a great deal to do with it; but it was her goodness, rather than her good looks."

"You have interested me," continued the detective. "Tell me more about her."

"Pardon me, old chap, if I draw the line. I'd rather not talk about her. Are you staying long in India, and

do you intend to see something of the country before you leave it?"

"Oh," laughed Nick, "I shall travel a little. I've a curiosity to see some parts of the country."

"I think that Carter would like to do what your paragon, Miss Darling, succeeded in doing," laughed Sir John. "He'd like to get in with some of the high-caste natives, and see something of real Indian life."

"That is easier said than done, you know," remarked Trevanion quietly. "I have never heard that Miss Darling was intimate with more than one native family of prominence. She was a great friend of Princess Dehra, daughter of Raja Gahnmahr-Bhopal—who, by the way, is the chap who lately lost his ruby. You know Bob Maitland had a country place of his own, not far from Bhopal. I bought it from him. It is mine now."

"You don't say!" laughed Sir John. "I suppose you bought it because the fair one had lived there; eh?"

"Perhaps I did; who knows. Anyhow, I'm going up there to-morrow to see the place. I wish you could go with me, Monty; and you, also, Algy;" then he turned to Nick, with a smile, and added: "And you, also, Mr. Carter, since you are a friend of Monty's."

"Thank you," said Nick, in reply. "I should like very much to go; very much indeed."

"Very good. If you will keep me company, I would like to have you as my guest for the few days I will remain there, whether the others go or not; and I see by their looks that neither of them can. Is it a bargain? Will you accompany me?"

"Yes; thank you again."

"We will start in the morning, then; at eleven, I think, the train goes. It is about six hundred miles, and the train takes twenty hours to make it. Possibly if the old raja is at home I can get an opportunity to present you. He's a fine old chap, and has always been very nice to me. I hear he is terribly broken up about the loss of his ruby."

Nick was saying something in reply to the invitation, when he heard Sir John exclaim:

"Hello, Simrha! Well, well! How came you here? I suppose you miss your old master, eh?"

"Yes, sahib, Sir John; very moche indeed."

Turning in his chair, Nick saw a tall, handsome East Indian servant of the better class, and Sir John explained that he had been for years in the employ of Colonel Maitland.

"Simrha is one of the most faithful chaps I ever knew in this benighted country," continued the baronet. "Bob thought the world of him, and why he didn't take him back with him is more than I can guess." And as Simrha returned at that moment, he turned to him and asked: "How long were you with the colonel, Simrha?"

"He engaged me, sahib, the very first day he was in

the country, and I remained with him until the day he left it," was the proud reply.

"Why didn't you go to England with him, Simrha?"

"Too far away, sahib. I am too old to learn new things now. Mees Darling weesh me to go to her home with her, but I say no. Too far."

He turned away to attend to his duties, and Nick made a mental note of his name. He decided, then and there, that he would have a talk with Simrha before he left India.

The following morning at eleven the detective took the train, in company with Jack Trevanion, for Bhopal, which was the nearest railway-station to the palace of the raja he wished to interview.

There was only one conversation between them during the ride which is pertinent to the present story, and that came about when Nick purposely expressed considerable admiration for an Egyptian scarab that the Englishman wore, set in a very ancient gold ring.

"I don't think I ever saw one of that color before," he said. "They are mostly green, are they not? and this one is almost red."

"Yes. It is peculiar. It has been very much admired. I lost it once, and I was nearly crazy about it, too."

"How did that happen, and how did you recover it again?" asked Nick, who saw by the expression of Trevanion's face that the story would be of interest.

"I don't know to this day how I happened to lose it," he replied. "It disappeared very mysteriously. I thought it had been stolen. But it turned out, after all, that I had lost it. I can't imagine, even now, how it ever got off my finger. It was, by the way, Miss Darling who found it for me."

"Really? Then you think more than ever about it now, I suppose?"

"Yes. It was gone four days. I took on so about it that everybody was sorry for me, and finally Miss Darling said that she believed we could find it. If we looked for it. Well, we did look, and it was her sharp eyes that finally discovered it. It had been ground into the path by somebody's heel, and was almost out of sight. We were at Maitland's place at the time—the place where we are going now."

"Indeed! Was Miss Darling an admirer of scarabs?"

"She had the greatest admiration for jewels of any sort: not that a scarab could be called a jewel, by any stretch of the imagination, you know. I took her once to see the jewels of the Maharaja of Maddikerai, and it was better than going to a theater to see her when they were exhibited. You know he is said to have the greatest collection in the country, only they are

mostly small stones, although the settings of many of them are so old that their histories are forgotten even by the family that owns them."

"It must have been a treat to her, I should think."

"It was. I have always been glad that I took her there. It was the happiest day of my whole life. Miss Darling enjoyed it so much that I almost thought she was in love with poor me at last; but all the while it was only the jewels that she fell in love with. But you should have seen her. She is an extraordinarily beautiful woman, you know, anyway; but that day when she was inspecting those jewels—well, the sight of her made me gasp."

The detective felt that there was no doubt that he was on the right track.

He had read the woman he was following so far correctly. Could it be that he had read her correctly all the way through?

It would seem so. She possessed that extraordinary passion for precious stones which might make her a thief; it was evident to Nick that she had actually stolen the scarab, and afterward returned it when she saw and realized the real sorrow its loss entailed upon its owner; she had managed to become an intimate with the Princess Dechra; she had been a privileged guest at the palace of the raja, and she had managed throughout to maintain a certain air of mystery about herself which had defied all of her Indian acquaintances.

She had visited the country every year for twelve or thirteen years; her friends had a country-place near the palace of the raja who owned "The Goddess' Heart." Surely, in twelve or thirteen years there must have been opportunities to get the impression of six keys.

"Miss Darling is the woman," the detective told himself; "but how am I to find her? How am I to trace her, if not one of these fellows will show me her picture? And, above all, how am I to prove the theft of the ruby against her, when she is found?"

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE PALACE OF THE RAJA.

They called upon the old raja at noon of the day following their arrival at Bhopal. The call was by appointment, and they were bidden to tiffin.

When they entered the room where they were received, Trevanion uttered an exclamation of dismay as he greeted

their host. The old man was care-worn and haggard, and, as Trevanion afterward expressed it to Nick, "a mere ghost of himself."

"You see a great change in me, Major Trevanion," said the raja, with a sad smile, and in perfect English. "It is because of the loss of my ruby. I cannot seem to recover from it, although my heart tells me that it will be recovered; that I shall live to see it again, and to return it to the onyx box in the sacred room. Would you like to see the room where it was kept so many years, gentlemen? Come. I will show it to you."

He led them to that room which has already been described, and where now the door stood widely ajar, where the lid of the onyx box was now invitingly raised.

"I leave them so," he explained, "in order that the person who took the ruby may return it without difficulty, in case of an inclination to restore it to me. See; look here beside the onyx casket. Do you see? Here are Bank of England notes for two hundred thousand pounds, and he who returns the ruby to its place may carry them away with him. My heart's blood was in that ruby, gentlemen. I do not live while it is gone from me. I only exist until its return, and then I shall happily lay aside the burdens of life, and leave them to my son."

"May I ask after the health of the princess?" asked Trevanion, after their return to the chairs on the wide veranda, overlooking a garden of flowers that surpassed anything that the detective had ever seen.

"She is like the rest of us, saddened by our loss," replied the superb old man. "To-day, however, she has received a letter from far-away America which has cheered her somewhat. It came, by the way, from the lady whom you know quite well, major; I refer to Miss Darling. Mr. Carter, you are an American. I wonder if by chance you know her, also?"

"No; I think not," replied the detective.

"That is your misfortune, sir. She is a superb creature, if I may speak so of a beautiful young woman—though not so young, after all. We learned to be fond of her here. It is a regret that she will return no more. She writes, major, that she is married."

Trevanion turned white at this simple announcement. He seized upon the rail near at hand and clung to it for a moment. Then slowly he recovered himself, and presently he said, quite naturally:

"Will you tell me, prince, what her name is now?"

"Alas! I do not know. She did not mention it in the letter. Evidently she forgot to do so. She signed herself merely with the name of Imogene."

"She wrote, I suppose," ventured Nick, "to condole with you upon the loss of your ruby?"

"Yes. It seems that there was an account of it in the city papers where she resides. It is your great city of New York. She expressed the belief that the person who took it would presently regret the act and return it. In fact, she prophesied it."

"Miss Darling seems to have won your heart as well as some others', prince," said Nick. "I suppose she was a frequent guest with you?"

"She won all hearts, Mr. Carter. Yes, she was here frequently. We all loved her. She was made as much at home with us, as you say in your language, as if she were one of the family."

"I suppose she had frequent opportunities to look upon 'The Goddess' Heart,' is that the case, prince?"

"She might have seen it at any time she wished, had she asked; but, no. If I remember correctly, it so happened that she never saw it but once; and that"—with a deep sigh—"was that last time that any of us saw it."

"Have you no idea at all how the ruby was stolen?" the detective asked.

"None whatever. It is utterly beyond my comprehension. The keys were never out of the possession of those who carried them."

"Take your own key, for instance, prince; what did you do with it when you slept?"

For reply the raja reached inside his collar and drew out a slender gold chain that encircled his neck; and looped at the end of the chain was the key in question.

"I have always carried it here," he explained. "The remaining keys are worn in the same manner by their guardians."

"Duplicates of them might have been made from impressions of the keys, secured from you and the others while they slept? Has that occurred to you?"

"Yes; but I regard it as improbable. How could the thief have gained access to the palace, in the first place? How, after that, to my bedchamber? And to the bed-chambers of my sons and my daughter, and the high priest, and the captain of the guard? If it were I alone, or if it were any one of us alone, it would be perhaps a possibility; but all of us? No. I cannot contemplate it."

"And yet, keys were used. The locks were turned. The door and the box were not only opened, but they were closed and locked again after the ruby was stolen, in order that you might not discover its loss until long afterward."

"It is true—quite true, sir; it is a mystery."

"Have you no suspicion in your mind, sir?"

"None. I have looked about me in vain for some one or some thing upon whom, or upon which, to cast suspicion; but in vain."

"Have you tried to fix the time when it was stolen?"

"No; save that it was at some time during the five months after Princess Deehra's birthday until the casket was opened to exhibit the stone to your countryman; a Mr. Gorman."

"Why not the very night of the birthday reception? There were guests here at that time. Would it not be logical to suspect one of them?"

"Suspect a guest, Mr. Carter?"

"Suspect everybody in a case of this kind."

"Ah; but none of those. There was Miss Darling and her cousins—all friends of yours, major; and there was the Marquis de Plantois, an old and dear friend of mine, with his wife and daughter. They were all. Upon every one of them I could rely as upon myself."

"Your faith is boundless, prince."

"Without faith, what would one have left? I have faith now that the ruby will be returned to me before I pass on to the brighter world; without that I would not live an hour."

"If the person who despoiled you of your treasure could see you and hear you talk about it, I am certain that it would be returned. May I make a suggestion, prince?"

"Certainly."

"You have just now told us that Miss Darling, as we must continue to call her, since we do not know her husband's name—that Miss Darling, by her letter, has greatly cheered your daughter, the princess. My suggestion is that you invite her to visit you here, with her husband, in order that her presence may cheer you both."

The grand old man smiled indulgently.

"I have anticipated your suggestion, Mr. Carter," he said. "Deehra is even now indicting such a letter. It is true that she knows not how to address it, save to

the old name and the old address; but she believes that it will be delivered."

"Indeed! If you would give me that address, prince, I would be glad, on my return, to send my card to the lady, with the explanation that I have been here to see and talk with you. She might be glad to hear directly from you—and the princess."

"You shall have it. I will send for Deehra at once," and he struck a gong that hung near him, summoning an attendant, to whom he gave the necessary direction.

It was ten minutes later, perhaps, when the Princess Deehra joined them on the wide veranda, where the scent of thousands of blossoms filled the air. As Nick rose to greet her, he saw the ideal type of feminine East Indian perfection. She was tall and darkly beautiful, with wonderful eyes and hair, willowy in her grace of motion, superb in her queenlike bearing.

She acknowledged the introduction to Nick with a stately curtsy. Trevanion she knew well, and gave him her hand.

"This gentleman is from America," said the raja. "He lives in that city of New York where our friend resides. He is soon to return there, and he proposes that he will call upon Imogene and tell her of his visit to us. Will you provide him with the address, Deehra?"

For a moment the princess was silent. Then she replied slowly:

"Alas! my father, I cannot. It would be breaking my promise to her. I do not think that she foresaw an occasion of this kind when she exacted it of me, but I gave my word, sir."

"Not to mention her address, Deehra?"

"Yes."

"Why was that?"

The princess glanced at Trevanion and blushed; then she smiled and replied:

"There were those in India who pursued her; who thought that she should marry one of them. Many of them persecuted her with letters while she was here. She dreaded lest that sort of persecution should continue after her return to America. It was to avoid that possibility that she exacted the promise from me, and that I gave it."

"But, my child, she is married now. All necessity for that precaution is past. And, besides, this case is different. This is one of her own countrymen, who is returning there to tell her of his call here; to tell her how

we take the loss of our ruby; to tell her that you are well, and that you think of her daily."

The princess shook her head.

"My letter will reach her before this gentleman could do so, sir. I would rather keep my promise to her than break it, my father."

And so the subject was dropped, once and for all time.

Nick realized that it was utterly useless to argue further with the princess, and he wisely forbore.

"I wonder," he said a little later to Trevanion, when they were for a moment alone together, "if the raja would permit me to be shown through the palace? I have never before had an opportunity to see the interior of an Indian palace like this one. I would appreciate it."

"I don't think there will be the least difficulty about that," replied the major; and when the raja returned to them, he preferred the request.

"With great pleasure, Mr. Carter," responded the raja. "Only I must ask you to excuse me from accompanying you. I am not as strong and agile as I once was, and I find too many steps are fatiguing. I regret that my sons are not here to meet you; but I will place you in the charge of my personal attendant, who will show you about as well or better than I could."

"And while you are gone, Carter," said Trevanion, "I will remain here with the prince."

Nothing could have suited Nick's purposes better than this arrangement, for it left him practically alone to observe all he cared to; and there was much that he wished to see without the appearance of eagerness or of prying.

We need not follow him upon that hour's jaunt. We will only look in upon a small part of it.

"Show me," he said to the attendant, when they were looking through the different suites of sleeping-apartments, "where the young lady called Miss Darling was roomed when she was a guest here."

The servant, delighted with an American who spoke his own language so perfectly, led the way to a beautifully appointed apartment of three rooms, and, throwing open the door, said:

"This is it, sahib. The rooms have not been occupied since the lady was here."

"And, now, while I am looking about me, and at the beautiful view from the window, will you be good enough to get me a glass of water? I am thirsty."

"With much pleasure, sahib."

And the servant departed on his errand, leaving the detective for the moment entirely alone in the rooms once occupied by Imogene Darling; rooms that had not been occupied since she vacated them.

CHAPTER X.

THE NAME ON THE WINDOW-PANE.

The detective knew when he was left alone that it would not be for long; that, at the best, the servant would be absent only a few minutes, and he passed quickly through into the bedchamber of the suite, believing that there, if anywhere, he would be apt to discover evidences of its last occupant.

The rooms were furnished after the English style, and here he saw a tall chiffonier that stood near one corner of the room, which offered possibilities.

Although he opened every drawer in it with great haste, it contained nothing save a little heap of torn bits of paper, evidently once a letter, in the top drawer.

Perceiving that the torn bits of paper had once been a letter, and discovering enough of one word to know that it had been written in English, he hastily brushed the whole pile of them into an old envelope that he took from his pocket, and closed the drawer again.

After that he looked carefully around the room, and, save for a pair of discarded gloves, a bit of torn lace, and a short strip of ribbon, he found nothing to interest him. The gloves he retained, smiling to think how greatly Lord Algy might have prized them. The other things he tossed back where he found them.

Then, hearing the sound of approaching footsteps, he strolled over to the window that overlooked a flower-garden, and was gazing out of it when the servant entered with the water.

Nick took it, thanked the man, and drained the goblet; and then, as he was turning away, a scratch upon one of the panes of glass in the window attracted his attention, and he turned to examine it more carefully.

It was well that he did so, for he was instantly interested.

The scratching upon the glass had evidently been done inadvertently, and during an idle moment, when the owner of the diamond that had made the marks had been concentrated upon some other thought than what

her hand was tracing, for there was every evidence that later she had sought to obliterate what she had originally written.

Straight lines and zigzag lines had been drawn through and across the letters first made. Then diagonal lines over those; but still he could faintly discern the outlines of well-formed letters—the letters of a name.

"See," he remarked, for now he realized that the servant was watching him curiously. "Some one has scratched the glass here, with a diamond. Look! It is too bad, isn't it?"

"It is nothing," replied the man, shrugging his shoulders. "The lady wore many diamonds. I suppose she wrote her name there, and then scratched it out."

"No," said the detective. "It is not Miss Darling's name. She would have begun with an I, or a D, and this first letter is very plainly to me an R. Wait; let me see if I can decipher it."

He bent himself to the task with more than usual eagerness, while the servant looked on smilingly, thinking only that the guest was finding a strange way to amuse himself.

But try as he might, Nick could make no more of the first name that had been written there, than that first letter—R. There was a space, however, after that, and then unmistakably, a capital D, then one small letter that was obliterated, then a small W with a tall letter beside it which might have been an l, or possibly a b, or a d, then two more obliterated letters followed by another one that had a tail to it, and which might have been y, g, or z. After that there was another capital letter which he could not decipher, although he was satisfied that it was a B, or a P; and in the middle of this last name—he could not determine how many letters it had contained, so thoroughly had it been scratched out—there was one small letter that had a tail to it.

On the back of an envelope he wrote as follows:

R—D. .wb. .g B—y—

R—D.wd. .y B—g—

R—D.wl. .g P—z—

"There," he remarked to himself. "With that cryptogram I ought to make out something, as soon as I have the opportunity to study it. Possibly those scraps of a letter may be of assistance."

"The apartments of the Princess Deehra adjoin this one," the servant informed him, as they were about to leave the room. "When Mees Darling was here, the

connecting doors were opened so they could be much together."

"That was very pleasant for them both, doubtless," replied Nick, with apparent indifference. "I suppose they were much together?"

"Ah, they were inseparable, those two; and so beautiful when they were together."

"By the way," said Nick, "were you here in the palace the night when the ruby was stolen, Jahro?"

"Ah, sahib, nobody knows what night the ruby was taken; but I have been here every night, so I was here, of course, as you say."

"The guard over the sacred chamber must have slept at his post, don't you think so?"

"He swears that he did not; but who knows? He might have thought that he did not sleep, and yet have done so."

There was only one thing more that the detective wished to accomplish now before he took his departure, and that was to secure a few moments' conversation with the princess alone; and this he succeeded in doing soon after he returned to the veranda.

The raja and his daughter were there with Trevanion, the two gentlemen being already engaged in the discussion of some Indian affair, and so Nick turned to the princess and, with his most winning smile, asked her:

"I wonder if I could induce you to show me your favorite flower, princess?"

"Indeed you may," she replied. Her English was almost as perfect as his own. "Come, if you will. It is named for our great ruby; 'The Goddess' Heart,' you know. I will show it to you."

"You must feel terribly about the loss of the ruby," he said to her, as they went together toward the garden.

"I do," she replied. "It is a personal loss to each and all of us. Even the servants of the household feel the same about it. But we have faith that it will be returned to us."

"So your good father told me. Your friend Miss Darling seems to have the same faith, for he tells me that she so assured you in her letter."

"Yes; her words have quite cheered me."

"You were very fond of her, princess?"

"I love her. We were like sisters when she was here. Only she always remained so short a time; never more than a week, and often only a day or two. Her visits to India were always extremely short."

"But she came often, did she not?"

"Every year; and once she came twice in one year."

"And how long is it since you first made her acquaintance?"

"Ah! That was twelve years ago. She came here first for shelter. She was alone and on horseback, and she was caught in one of our terrible storms. She came to us, and that is the way our acquaintance began."

"After that you were inseparable friends?"

"Yes, always. See, here is the flower that is named for the great ruby. Is it not beautiful? You observe that it is almost the shape of a heart, if two of the leaves are removed—so; and that it is blood-red?"

"Yes. Indeed it is beautiful. May I have one to preserve?"

"Take this one, Mr. Carter."

"Thank you. I will put it in this compartment of my pocketbook so it will not lose its shape. I believe you were in the habit of carrying one of the keys to the sacred chamber, princess, were you not?"

"Yes. Always. I have it now," and she drew from her bosom the golden chain to which it was attached.

She held it up for his inspection for a moment, and then returned it to its place.

"You have never parted with it for a moment?" asked the detective.

"No; I have never parted with it, Mr. Carter."

"Not even to put it in the hands of your bosom friend, Miss Darling?" he asked, smiling.

"Oh, I think I permitted her to hold it in her hand, once, when she was telling my fortune, but even then the chain was not removed from around my neck, and she only held it tightly clenched in her hand while she pretended to read my fate. But, really, she did it very well. We had great sport out of it, I remember."

"Probably. But why did she hold the key in order to tell your fortune?"

"It was necessary that she should hold something that was thoroughly charged with my personal magnetism, and which was at the time attached to me by metallic links. I think that was the reason. We made quite a joke of it, but it afforded considerable amusement."

"Naturally. And did she tell your father's fortune, also?"

"Indeed, yes. She told all our fortunes in that manner, at one time and another, even the high priest's. She used to pretend great seriousness about it, all the time

making faces at me behind the backs of those whose fortunes she was relating. But she would never tell more than one fortune at a visit."

"She told your brothers' fortunes, also?"

"Yes; and many of the upper servants. But nothing would induce her to tell more than one each year. She would say to the next one who demanded it of her: 'Wait until I come again. If I should tell another fortune now, it would ruin my own!'"

"It is too bad that you cannot give me her address in New York so that I might tell her of this visit to you. Does your promise to her hold you so sacredly, do you think?"

"Indeed, yes. She was very particular about it."

"Was that her full name—Imogene Darling?"

"Yes, Mr. Carter."

"What is her married name?"

"She forgot to mention it, and so I am compelled to address the letter I have just written to her to the old name and address. But I think it will reach her."

"You have mailed the letter?"

"Yes; it has already gone by carrier to Bhopal. It should be on its way to Bombay by now. I do hope that she will receive it all right."

"If not," said Nick, giving the princess his card, "you may send to me at that address, giving the last address of hers that you know, and I will find her for you."

It was late that evening when Trevanion and Nick returned to the bungalow, and even that was against the wishes of the raja, who invited them both to remain.

But the detective had accomplished all that he came there to do, and he was anxious now to return to Bombay, and then to London with all possible speed.

He knew now, beyond a doubt, that Imogene Darling, whoever she might be, held the ruby; and he knew that somehow he would find her, even though she had changed her name a hundred times.

He realized how easily she had obtained impressions of the keys by her fortune-telling plot, but he was amazed at the patience and sagacity of the woman who would refrain from telling more than one fortune in a year, lest her true reason for holding the key in her hand should be discovered.

Truly she had plotted and planned to some purpose, and with a determination to succeed that was marvelous for its persistency.

With the keys in her possession, as an inmate of the house, and with almost as much freedom within its walls as the princess herself, the mere drugging of the guard was an easy matter.

Nick began to feel that he was getting very closely on the track of the ruby.

CHAPTER XI.

A WONDERFUL WOMAN.

When Nick reached Bombay on his return, he at once sought the club where he had dined with Sir John and the two officers, and there he had no difficulty in finding Simrha, who had so long a time been a servant in the employ of Sir Robert Maitland.

"Do you remember me, Simrha?" he asked, as soon as he could call the servant to him.

"Yes, sahib."

"I want you to reply to a few questions for me, if you will, and, if you do so to the best of your ability, you shall have this gold piece to put into your pocket. I am going back to America very soon, Simrha, and I wish very much to find Miss Darling when I get there. I believe that you can tell me how I can find her, and no doubt you would like to send a message to her, also. If so, I will carry it. Now, can you tell me what her address is, in New York City."

"No, sahib. I do not know. It was never told me that I remember."

"But when she asked you to go to New York with her, did she not tell you where she lived, Simrha?"

"No; only that it was in a very large house on an avenue in the great city; a house in which there were many other servants. That is all I know."

"It was probably Fifth Avenue," mused the detective, aloud.

"Yes, sahib; that was it, Fifth Avenue."

"But you do not recall the mention of any number?"

"No, sahib."

"Simrha, did you ever hear her called by any other name than Imogene?"

"No."

"Was she a married woman, Simrha, or a single one?"

"I think, sahib, from things that I heard, that she had been married, but that it was unfortunate. There was once the mention of a husband, but it was hushed at once."

"She did not leave any address with you by which you could find her if ever you went to America?"

"No; because I told her that I should never go there."

"She was related to your lady, was she not?"

"Yes, sahib; a cousin. I have heard them say as much as that."

"She was in the habit of coming to visit your mistress every year, was she not?"

"Yes."

"And she never remained long in India, I am told."

"Never more than two or three weeks; often not longer than a week. She came and went, and always seemed in great haste to return to Paris or to London, where she always had an appointment to meet friends."

"She was always entertained at the bungalow near Bhopal, was she not?"

"Yes, sahib; there, or at the palace of the raja, which is near it. She was great friends with the Princess Deehra."

"Yes. I know. I suppose you have no idea where I could see a picture of her, have you?"

"No, sahib."

During the trip back from India to Europe the detective gave considerable attention to the study of the letters he had copied from the scratched window-pane in the palace, but try as he might he could make nothing of them, and at last he put the envelope away, resolved to await his interview with Patsy in London before attempting it again.

He had an idea that his second assistant might have picked up some information that would be of assistance, and he was eager to get in touch with him as soon as possible.

Time seems interminable to one who is in a hurry, but it passed at last, and the day came when he crossed the channel from Calais to Dover and went up by train to London.

He had wired ahead, and Patsy met him at the station, and from there they walked together to the Albemarle Street entrance to Brown's Hotel.

"Now, Patsy," he said, as soon as he had greeted Adelina, "I don't want to let the grass grow under my feet a minute. I know now, positively, that the woman who was known here and in India as Imogene Darling is the one who stole the ruby, and that therefore she has it in her possession now, for she is a collector, like our

good friend Mrs. Payson. And, by the way, the only description I could get of her, from old Sir John Montgomery, is not unlike Mrs. Payson. If it were possible that she could have gone to India every year, and were there last August when we know that she was traveling in Europe with her husband, I might almost think that she had had a hand in it. What have you found out here?"

"I have found out one thing, and that is that Sir Robert Bell Maitland is mighty touchy on the subject of Imogene Darling."

"Have you managed to get into personal contact with him, Patsy?"

"Yes; in good shape, too; but I spoiled it all by asking him pointblank one day who Miss Darling is, in New York, and where she lives. He shut up like a clam, and our acquaintance has been stone cold from that moment. But I discovered another thing that is rather a strange coincidence, after what you just said about Mrs. Payson."

"What was that?"

"The Maitlands have a very good picture of Mr. and Mrs. Payson, both of them."

"Eh? Is that so?"

"Yes. I was turning over the leaves of an old-fashioned album, when I was at their house the first time, and I came upon them. Both were evidently taken some years ago; I should think about the time they were married, or just before. Mrs. Payson's name was written in full on the back of her picture, and it looked as if her married name had been added afterward."

"Humph! What is her full name, Patsy?"

"It was written there 'I. Reina Dowling Payson.'"

The detective started to his feet with a suddenness that startled Patsy. He dived into his pocket and brought forth the envelope upon which he had copied the letters from the window-pane, and he spent several moments in studying them, to the great mystification of Patsy.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation of pleasure: then he laughed aloud.

"Upon my word, Patsy," he said, "I have been very stupid in this affair, I'm afraid. Look here. Take that lower line of letters and dashes. You see 'R-D. wl. g P-z' don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, substitute a y for the z, and what do you make

it? Eh? Isn't it 'Reina Dowling Payson' as plain as the nose on your face?"

"By jingo, that's right!"

"Now, on that picture you saw, you say there was an I before the other names. It follows, therefore, that Mrs. Payson's full name, before she was married, was Imogene Reina Dowling. Since that time she has dropped the Imogene and shortened Reina to Rena. On her excursions to India she changed Dowling into Darling, and there you are!"

"Well, I'll be blowed!" exclaimed Patsy, with fine disgust. "And to think that before we left New York we were within a few feet of the ruby all the time. Well, what do you think of that?"

"She is a wonderful woman, Patsy, that same Mrs. Payson."

"Wonderful? I should say so. But what I don't understand is how she could take those annual trips to India, and still keep her husband and everybody else ignorant of them."

"Easily; easily, my lad. Doubtless she came to Europe a couple of months earlier than Herbert wished to come, each year. Once over here, she would get herself 'invited' to some country place concerning which she would give a very vague address. Then she would write half a dozen letters, or more, to leave behind her to be posted each week, to her husband. After that she would skip off to India to carry on her plot, and to put one more spoke in the wheel. She never remained there more than a couple of weeks at a time, and rarely more than one."

"But I say, chief, how about the Maitlands? Aren't they accessories before the fact, in this case?"

"I'm going to find out that very thing to-night, Patsy. Go down-stairs, like a good fellow, and telephone to Inspector Henderson that I am here and would be indebted to him if he would come up to see me at once. He can get here from the Yard in twenty minutes or less."

"We wrote to Chick about the name on the back of the photograph," said Adelina, after Patsy had gone out. "He went around to see the Paysons, to find out if Mrs. Payson's maiden name was Dowling, but they were out of town."

"Well, take it altogether," said the detective musingly, "it is the most remarkable case I ever had. Here is a woman who began fourteen years ago to plot out the

stealing of the great ruby called 'The Goddess' Heart.' She worked out her plans almost inch by inch, never once being too hasty, never once making a false move. She left no stone unturned to carry out her purpose, and even after her spasm of reform, at the time she robbed her friends of their jewels, this other thing had gone so far that she could not bear the thought of abandoning it until it was fully accomplished. 'I'll tell you what, Adelina, I would like to make a wager with somebody that when at last Rena Payson did take that ruby she only intended to keep it for a time, and then to return it. She has already written to the raja's daughter that she thought the ruby would be returned; and if you could see how those people love and trust her, you would understand that if she has got any heart at all, she could not keep the stone.

"But again, she could not resist the temptation to feel that for a time at least she possessed the ruby to herself. She got it away from a place from which it was supposed to be impossible to steal it, and she did it without casting one breath of suspicion upon herself."

"And what do you intend to do about it now?" asked Adelina.

"Why, there is only one thing to do, and that is to force her to return the ruby, if, indeed, she is not already on her way to do so. You say that Chick reported them away from home? It looks to me as if she has relented already, particularly in the light of that letter she sent to the princess."

"Then she will get the million dollars reward herself; eh?"

"No, indeed. I will get it, to divide among us all, for I shall head her off somewhere."

"You are going to call upon the Maitlands to-night?" she asked.

"Yes."

"For what purpose?"

"To tell them what I know about the affair, and to discover if they have assisted Rena in this theft. If they have, by Jove! I'll make them wish they hadn't. I'd like to frighten somebody."

"Do you intend to take Inspector Henderson with you?"

"I'll take you all with me, if you care to go and see the fun, for I think there will be some fun before we are through with it. I mean to ask that milord why he introduced a woman to his friends under a false name;

and why, knowing her to be a married woman, he permitted it to be thought that she was single and therefore marriageable. Oh, he has a few things to answer for."

Suddenly he burst out laughing.

"What are you amused about?" Adelina asked him.

"I was thinking about that last call I made upon Rena Payson, when I substituted her name in the place of Imogene Darling, and so nearly called the turn about what had happened. She was, I remember now, extraordinarily interested. I thought then it was because there was a great ruby involved. I see now it was for another reason."

"She must have been at least highly entertained."

"I suppose she was. Adelina, that is a wonderful woman, if anybody should ask you."

CHAPTER XII.

THE RETURN OF "THE GODDESS' HEART."

At Nick Carter's suggestion it was the card of Inspector Henderson that was sent in to Sir Robert and Lady Maitland that evening. Underneath his name Nick had written for him the following words: "With two gentlemen and a lady, on important business."

Sir Robert came into the reception-room alone, a few minutes later, holding the card in his hand; and he glanced quickly from one face to another as he entered.

Nick he did not know; but Patsy and Adelina he recognized instantly, frowned, bowed stiffly, and then glanced inquiringly at the inspector.

"You are, I presume, the inspector whose card this is?" he inquired haughtily; and no one can be so freezingly haughty as an English army officer, when he chooses to be so. But Nick had Sir John Montgomery's word for it that Bob Maitland was a good fellow, and he believed it.

"Yes," replied the inspector.

"What is your business with me, inspector?"

"I am afraid, Sir Robert, much as I regret it, that my business must be stated in the presence of your lady. Such were my instructions, and I am under orders, just as you were, sir, while you were serving in India."

Without another word the baronet turned to the door, called a footman, and sent for his wife.

She came, presently, a tall, commanding, queenly, womanly woman. Nick liked her on the spot.

"Now, inspector," said the baronet, "is the presence of these other gentlemen and the lady necessary to our interview?"

"They are, sir."

"Then proceed. We have guests with us this evening—unexpected guests, and I must ask you to be as brief as possible."

"My orders, Sir Robert, are to permit this gentleman, here"—indicating Nick Carter—"to ask you a few questions to which I am to listen and report the answers."

"Well, sir?" The baronet wheeled haughtily upon the detective, placing his monocle in his eye as he did so, and transfixing him with a cold stare.

"I am here to ask you, Sir Robert, why you so far forgot the dignity of your high office in the army in India, as to introduce to your brother officers there, as a single woman, one whom you knew to be a married woman? Also, to ask you why you introduced her under a false name, and otherwise misrepresented her to them?"

At the beginning of the question the baronet flushed with anger; then, as it proceeded, he turned deathly pale, and by the time it was finished he had fallen back a step and was staring at the detective as if he had seen a ghost.

"Who are you, sir?" he demanded, instead of replying to the question. His wife had dropped terror-stricken upon a chair and was evidently startled out of her usual composure.

"That is not exactly a reply to my question, Sir Robert Maitland," said Nick coldly, "but I will answer your question before I insist upon your answering mine. I am a detective from the United States of America. My name is Nicholas Carter. Now, sir, will you tell me why, for nearly fourteen years, you have deceived your brother officers concerning the young married woman whose real name is Mrs. Herbert Payson? It is important that you should be quite frank with me in this matter, unless you wish to become involved in serious trouble."

"Will you explain to me, Mr. Carter, how it happens to be any of your business?" asked the baronet coolly. He was recovering his courage, which for a moment had fled.

"No, sir, I will not," replied Nick sharply. "You will reply to my question at once, unless you and your wife wish to be placed immediately under arrest as accessories

before and after the fact to the theft of the great ruby known as 'The Goddess' Heart,' front—"

"My God, sir! what do you mean?"

"I think my words were sufficiently plain. Will you answer my question?"

"It was a hoax, sir; a lark; a joke; nothing else in the beginning. After that it could not be changed without going into explanations. I foolishly permitted the joke to continue. My wife's cousin was never there with us more than a couple of weeks at a time. But——"

"But the *Ruby*?" gasped his wife. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, madam, that the young woman whom you introduced as Imogene Darling, and whose real name was Imogene Reina Dowling Payson, stole the raja's ruby, and that you and your husband are, in the law, for what you have done, equally guilty with her in the commission of the crime." Turning to the baronet, he continued:

"You say, sir, that it was a hoax, a joke, a lark, begun innocently. That story, in the light of what has happened since, would sound rather weak in a court of law; don't you think so?"

The baronet did not answer. Instead, he did a strange thing. He darted past the detective, ran to the door, opened it, and cried out to the footman:

"Summon the lady and gentleman who are in the library. Tell them to come here at once. Do you hear? At once!"

Returning to the center of the room, he continued:

"I will ask you to wait a moment, sir. The party of whom you are speaking happens to be in this house at the present moment. Mrs. Payson is here!"

The door was opened at that moment, and Rena entered the room, closely followed by her husband.

In the first glance that she gave around her, she took in the situation; but after the first start of surprise, she exclaimed:

"Why, Mr. Carter! And Mr. Garvan! And *Adelina*! What a delight! How do——"

"Good evening, Mrs. Payson," said Nick, coldly interrupting her. "We are not here to play at compliments. We came here to place this gentleman and his lady under arrest for complicity in the crime you committed in India. We did not know that Miss Darling, alias Rena Dowling Payson, was in England. If you happen to have 'The Goddess' Heart' with you at this moment, which I do not doubt, you can turn it over to me at once. Otherwise you will go at once from here to a

prison cell. There will be no compromise in this matter, Mrs. Darling-Dowling-Payson, other than the return of the jewel to me, now. If that is done, you will be permitted to remain in this house overnight, although an officer will remain here to guard you. After that, if you have any humanity left in you, you will clear this gentleman and his lady of complicity with you."

Rena had turned deathly pale while Nick was speaking; now she tottered and almost fell; but she recovered herself after a moment; then she turned her back and crossed to a corner of the room, where she struggled with the bosom of her waist for a moment.

When she turned around again she held in her extended hand an oblong package.

"Take it!" she said; and then, when the detective had it in his grasp and before he could open the package to see that it contained the ruby, she went on rapidly:

"I have confessed the whole thing to my husband, Mr. Carter. We are here now on our way to India to return it to the raja and his daughter. You may believe me or not, it is the truth."

"I believe you, madam. Indeed, I had already decided that you would do that. But the fact does not lessen the enormity of your crime. You have traded for more than thirteen years, or about that length of time, upon the love, affection, and confidence of the old raja and his beautiful daughter Deehra; you pretended to tell their fortunes while all the time you were taking impressions of the keys to the sacred room and to the onyx box; you stole down in the dead of night, like the thief you were, to that sacred room, past the guard whom you had drugged, and robbed the hand that fed you, the hearts that loved you, abusing the hospitality of the people who took you in out of a storm and succored you. You betrayed every principle of gratitude, every quality of your womanhood for the sake of carrying out a plot so monstrous that I wonder at you for entertaining it. Now, what have you to say?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. Everything you say to me is just. I deserve all the punishment that you can give me."

"Very well, then, madam, I will tell you what that punishment will be. It is that you go back with me to India, starting to-morrow morning, and that in the palace of the raja you make a full and complete confession of the entire plot, from the beginning to the end of it, to the raja, and his sons and daughters, the high priest, and the

servants of the house; and that, after that, you submit yourself to his will."

"I will do that gladly. I had determined to do it, anyhow."

"In the meantime, madam, you will consider yourself under arrest, and under the personal charge of Inspector Henderson." He turned to the baronet.

"Sir Robert," he said, "I am sorry to have caused you any annoyance. I have not really thought, any of the time, that you were a party to this thing. But I would suggest, if you can spare the time, that you return with us to India, to see this thing through, and forever to clear your name and your wife's from association with it."

"Thank you, Mr. Carter. We will go."

The old raja rose slowly to his feet, stately and noble in his native grandeur. His kind old face and kinder eyes looked down upon the woman who was kneeling at his feet, weeping, having just finished her confession, in which she had told all without sparing herself. His daughter, Princess Deehra, his two sons, and his younger daughters were gathered around; the princess was also weeping. Nick Carter, with Patsy, Adelina, and Inspector Henderson, stood at the far end of the group, and near them were Sir Robert Maitland and Lady Mildred. The old man hesitated a moment; then he reached out his right hand and rested it lightly upon the bowed head of the weeping woman.

"Rise, my daughter," he said, in a voice that was wondrously soft and kind. "We have loved you in the past: we love you still. If you have brought pain to our hearts by what you have done, you have brought still more joy to us now by the fulness of your confession, by the completeness of your conversion to what is right and true. Rise, my daughter, and receive my blessing. Your own Bible tells you, and it is in our book of laws, too, that there is more joy in heaven over one who repenteth, than over ninety and nine who have no cause for repentance. We take you again into our heart, into our love, into our home. Deehra, my child, take Imogene to her room and comfort her. Go, my daughter, and know that you are fully and freely forgiven."

THE END.

The next number—585—will contain "The Signal of Seven Shots; or, Nick Carter's Struggle for His Life."



NEW YORK, March 7, 1908.

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

Perhaps the most successful snake-catcher in the country is Griffith Jones, a Welshman, who lives at Tobyhanna, Pennsylvania. He has not only succeeded in bagging hundreds of rattlers, but has formed a sort of company of snake-catchers, and has sometimes as many as thirty men out catching every variety of snake to be found in the Pennsylvania rocks and woods.

This Welshman, who has lived in almost every country in the world, knows snakes as the ordinary man knows dogs. He starts out in the morning, wearing thigh-boots and carrying a long forked stick. Also he has a big bag, made of stout canvas. He rarely returns without as many living and dead snakes in the bag as he can conveniently carry.

It seems to trouble Jones but little that he is within a hairbreadth of death all the time he is snake-hunting. He has never been bitten, and says he never need be, unless he fights while snake-hunting and the "bag" gets at him.

With his simple outfit, he trudges to the haunt of the rattler and the copperhead, not because they are the snakes most to be feared, but because, for some odd reason, there is more demand for the skin of the most deadly snake than for that of the harmless, although equally beautiful variety. The explanation probably is that those who wear belts made of snake-skin or carry pocketbooks made from the cuticle of a crawler like to tell about the awful danger attending the capture of the reptile whose skin they display.

Jones knows exactly where to go to rout the snakes from their lairs. With his long forked stick he probes into the holes in the rock, rudely disturbing the long sleep of the hibernating reptiles and forcing them to come out and give battle.

As soon as a neck protrudes from a hole, down comes the forked end of the stick just behind the head of the rattler, and, before the snake can do more than shoot out its forked

tongue in angry protest, it is whisked into the canvas bag and permitted to vent its useless rage on the lining.

Wherever possible, Jones takes the snake alive, for live rattlers or copperheads are more valuable than dead ones. Usually, however, the snake cannot be bagged without a struggle, and it is then a case of stunning or killing it, and the only value attaching to the capture is the price of its skin.

The snake-skins bring prices up to a dollar each, according to their size and quality.

Jones has a process of treating the skins, and by his method of tanning retains the beautiful markings.

The worst part of the work, according to Jones, is not the danger of being bitten, but the disappointment attending the attempt to capture the snakes. Out of three hundred attacked, he says he is averaging well if he captures a hundred. The snake can wriggle out of very close quarters, and seldom stops to argue with his enemy or protest against capture. He is off for the smallest hole he can find, and unless the hunter is as quick as a lightning-flash with his long pole he will lose the quarry.

The snake-hunter strikes oil, so to speak, when he lights upon a nest of snakes comfortably ensconced in some cranny for the winter. These snakes will probably be bunched together for the sake of warmth, and can be captured en masse with little difficulty, as they are sleepy and sluggish. Sometimes there are as many as a hundred snakes in one of these bunches, but such a find is not often recorded.

Jones hunts through the Delaware Water Gap and Mount Pocono. He says there are two good seasons for the snake-hunter, one is in April and May, the other in October and November. During November the snakes are half-frozen and in a semistupor, and can almost be captured by hand.

The doctoring of wild animals in captivity is an art in itself. A zoologist gives some queer examples of the mode of treating disorders among serpents.

"I once had to deal with a big boa-constrictor which had an ulcerated tooth. Finding that the only remedy would be extraction, I had the reptile dragged out of its cage and held by several men, while its tooth was drawn by a dentist.

"In another instance I attended a python which had failed to shed its skin at the right time. The snake was held by the keepers while I forced some medicine down its throat with a stick. The skin came off soon afterward.

"The most ticklish patient I ever undertook to cure was an Indian cobra with a lacerated jaw, the result of a fight with another snake. In this case we bandaged the reptile's head, keeping the bandage moist with liniment sprayed from a distance, for the work of dressing the jaw at close quarters was one that nobody exactly relished."

Not every dog draws a salary. There died, one time back, in this country, a dog which got its wages in an envelope every month. The animal was a great favorite with the employees at a big railway-station, and rendered useful work at a crossing.

The occasion of his being put on the pay-list was as follows:

A man was approaching the crossing, which is a danger-

ous one. A fast train was approaching, and the dog, as usual, came along to see if all was well. The animal was fifty yards ahead of the engine, and in dog-fashion he tried to warn the man of danger. The man, however, paid no attention, but kept on.

Just as he got within three feet of the metals, the animal jumped up and knocked him back prostrate. A moment later the engine passed by. But for the dog the man would have been killed.

The story was told to the authorities of the railway, and it was unanimously decided that the dog should henceforth be maintained at the company's expense.

A man who witnessed a fight between a porcupine and a blacksnake thus describes the battle:

"I came upon the scene just as the hedgehog began, the attack upon the snake, which was lying stretched out on the road asleep. The hedgehog advanced cautiously upon the reptile and seized its tail in his mouth, giving it a sharp bite. Then he quickly withdrew a few feet, and, rolling himself into a compact, spiny ball, awaited developments. The snake, upon being thus rudely awakened, turned in fury upon its antagonist, striking the hog again and again with its fangs. The wily hedgehog, securely intrenched within his spiny armor, remained perfectly motionless all the while, allowing the snake to keep up the attack. At every stroke the jaws of the snake would become filled with the spines, until at last, exhausted and bleeding from wounds caused by the needlelike spines of the hog, the snake gave up the battle. This was evidently what the hedgehog was waiting for, as he immediately proceeded to roll over the snake again and again until he had completely disemboweled his victim."

It is hard to believe that the greedy and cruel shark spares anything dead or alive, but sailors declare that "it flies a feather." The fish follows ships from sea to sea, and will swallow all sorts of articles—even knives—that may be thrown overboard.

Seamen say, however, that it will not touch the pilot-fish—a small fish, with the look of a mackerel, that is—wrongly supposed to earn the shark's gratitude by guiding it to its prey—or a fowl, living or dead.

In short, the shark avoids sea-gulls, petrels, and every feathered thing. This is what sailors tell us, from their own observation.

"As to watch-dogs, now," said the retired burglar, "I never owned a watch-dog, but I did once own a jolly little mongrel dog that we called sometimes Nibs, but mostly Nibsy, a lively, sensitive little fellow, but no watch-dog. You might have played a brass band outside and he'd never hear it; but let anybody that he knew walk across the floor, and he'd wag his tail in his sleep.

"Well, after we'd had Nibsy a number of years we lost him. He just disappeared one day and didn't come back; and we didn't know whether he'd been run over by a train or a car or strayed away and got lost, or whether somebody had picked him up and carried him off, or what was the matter, but he didn't come back, and we missed him very much, because we all liked Nibsy.

"Now, maybe you can guess what happened. One morning early, about two or half-past two, some months after that, as I was moving slowly in the dark across a room on the second floor of a house that I had called at some fifty miles from where I lived, I felt the legs of a small dog thrown against mine. I couldn't see the dog at all, but it was standing on its hind legs and resting its fore legs against me, and I could tell by the movement of them that he was wagging his tail violently. It was Nibsy, of course. He'd known my tread, soft as it was, and woke up to receive me.

"Well, you know, glad as I was to find Nibsy, I'd rather not have found him there, because he was almost certain to make trouble for me. He began to whine with joy the first thing, and then he gave a little yelp. That was just what I was afraid of. He didn't want to make any trouble for me, but that one yelp was enough. A man in the bed sits up and pulls a string and turns on a light, and says:

"Now, what's the matter?"

"And I puts up a great polar bluff, and says: 'You swiped my dog, and I've come to get him.'

"Swiped nothing," he says. 'I'll swipe you in a minute,' and he wasn't slow in getting at it, either. He was getting out of bed and coming for me all the time he was talking, and a good, healthy, powerful-looking man he was, too. But Nibsy was bright. Nibsy made just one dive at the man's feet, but that was enough to stop him until I'd got turned and started, and a minute later I was going down the road, with Nibsy coming on behind."

A DIVER'S NARROW ESCAPE.

"When the *Anglo-Saxon*, a ship laden with costly merchandise, ran into Chance Cove, on the Newfoundland coast, and sank by striking a hidden reef, the government at once took steps to have all that the unlucky ship contained removed. There were over a hundred persons on board, but not so much as one, if my memory serves me, escaped. When the ship was lifted by a heavy swell upon the sharp ledge she 'hung' there, as sailors say, but with the rise of the tide she was lifted off the ledge and went down, head first, into the deep water lying inside. There was a passage from outside leading to this deep water, so that fishes or sea beasts might go in or out in quest of prey. There was no beach or strand, but upright, naked cliffs in the form of a semicircle rose around to a height of about three hundred feet. Giving back a little on the top was a lighthouse.

"As soon as possible divers were brought to the spot, but it was difficult to find it smooth enough to go down. The first day we got below we could do little but lay out our plan of operations. The ship was on her side, the stump of the masts turned toward land. I had never gone down before in water so far north, and the place was so wild that I was timid. Lines were attached to our bodies and the ends fastened in the skiff above, so that if any diver pulled his line he was at once drawn to

the surface. We walked about the bottom and around the ship with our feet weighted to keep us from rising.

"The water was a pale-green, and I could notice objects quite plainly for many yards distant. There was a huge break in the bottom of the ship, her stern was stove in, so was her stern. Already the fishes had discovered that there was feasting inside, for as I was about to enter by the hole in the bow a number of Spanish mackerel, cod, sculpins, and dogfish began to flounder about inside. I moved back, for I did not know but there might be a shark there.

"There were, as you know, over a hundred in the ship, so I was anxious that they should be saved from the desecration of these fishes. Worst of all to get among the bodies of the drowned are Spanish mackerel and cod. I had charge, so we all went to the top and made arrangements for getting the dead. I shall not give you the details, but, after extremely hard work, two days saw our ghastly task completed.

"Then came the raising of the costly merchandise. It was mostly silks and cashmere shawls. One afternoon, while my two men remained above repairing their diving-apparatus, I went down alone. We were now removing the bales from the after-compartment of the ship and had only one way to enter or leave this compartment—namely, by the break in the stern. The method of raising the goods was to lower down heavy hooks which could be fastened into the bales after they were pushed outside. Some of these bales or cases would float and some would rest lightly on the bottom. I had selected a large case, which I was about to move, when, happening to turn my eyes, I saw outside a huge creature moving toward the vessel. I had never seen anything like it before. Its body was four or five feet high and about twice that length, and it had on each side an enormous arm. There seemed to be an unlimited number of legs attached to the hideous creature. Its color was a dun-brown, mottled over with dark spots. Two round, black, shining eyes were in its forehead, and two supple horns, each resembling an enormous whip, likewise came out of its head. All this I noticed with one glance. A numb terror seized me, and I moved for the outlet from the ship.

"But as if knowing what I intended, this brute, looking straight at me with its frightful eyes, walked, or, rather, crawled, directly toward me. I hurried, in the hope of being able to seize the hanging hook, now my only means of signaling the skiff; but it hurried, too, and I had barely put my foot upon a gray rock outside when the two writhing horns of the detestable creature were twining about me and again untwining. Then he would touch me with these and sweep them up and down, as if feeling what description of prey I was. The round, frightful eyes seemed to burn through and through me. In my hand I held the crowbar which I used to loosen

the cargo; in my left I carried a heavy sheath-knife. These were my only weapons.

"Suddenly and without any warning the monster threw out one of its arms and seized me below the shoulder. I felt as if my bones were being crushed and that my arm would soon be severed from my body. No sooner had he done this than he turned and began to drag me into a deeper corner of the nook. The more I resisted the more terrible was the pain, so I had to go, turning over in my mind what I should do. I still had the crowbar in my right hand, but it was of no use to me. So I let it drop.

"But the horror of that time! Well, I knew why the awful thing was dragging me to this quiet place. He was going to devour me.

"His arm terminated in a claw which opened and shut. This horrible mouthlike thing had two rows of shining white teeth. Several of these were piercing my arm to the bone. Some distance above this mouthlike arm I observed a joint, and then I drew my knife. But, alas! the heavy shell so overlapped the fleshy tissue that I could not injure my captor. Still he dragged me on, on, till at last the deepest part of the sea nook was reached. There he stopped and turned those terrifying eyes again upon me. The whiplike arms again began to move and curl about my body, and a hideous motion seemed to run through the body of the terrible fish. What this meant I knew.

"His head was only about a foot distant from my body, and, drawing my knife again, I plunged the blade into the eye nearest me, turning the blade round and round. I saw that I had destroyed the eye, for an inky fluid issued out of the socket, darkening the water about its head. This checked the aggressive movements of the thing, but did not seem to hurt it. I waited, waited for many seconds, I think, and then its head turned, so I supposed, that it might be enabled to see its prey. This was what I wanted, and with a sure, swift thrust I sent my knife into his other eye, down to the hilt. This time it must have touched the brain, for the beast reeled, and the grip on my arm slightly relaxed. But though totally blind, my captor had no idea of releasing me.

"The agony of my arm soon grew unbearable, and the waters around me seemed to be filling with greenish smoke. A strange sound began to buzz in my ears and my pain seemed to disappear. I thought, too, that I saw other figures moving about the ship; then the light went out of my eyes and I remembered nothing more.

"When I recovered my senses I was in the skiff and learned how the divers, alarmed at my long silence below, had come down. They saw my plight, and after a time succeeded in severing the arm from the body of the fish, which they both declared was the awful deep-sea lobster."

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